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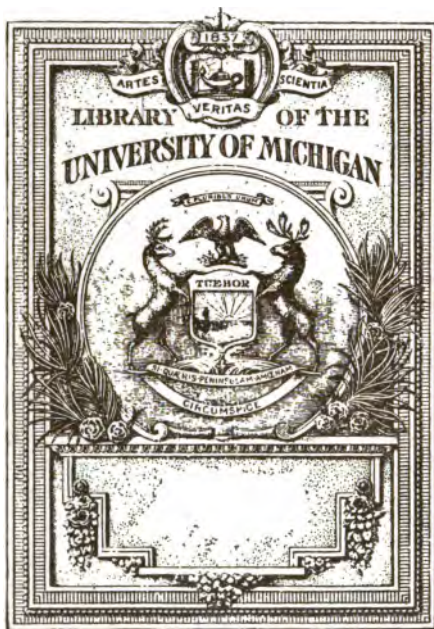
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ISBAN-ISRAEL



ISBAN-ISRAEL

A South African Story

BY

GEORGE COSSINS



GAY AND BIRD

22 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

LONDON

1896

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21

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14 May 23. E.H.W.

'ISBAN-ISRAEL'

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

NURSE FIRMIN'S STORY

YOU would not care to hear the history of my early life, it was like the lives of many other women which have been told by abler pens than mine; suffice it to say, that after a short period of not too happy married life I went out into the world to earn my own living; after years of drudgery as governess and companion, fate put in my way the chance of going to Australia as companion to an invalid lady. When she died I became a probationer in the Adelaide Hospital in South Australia. I first saw the light in the little village of Ordchester in Somersetshire. I call it Ordchester, though that is not its real name, because, if I mentioned my birthplace, who knows but what, sooner or later, a swarm of relations might spring up to claim a share in the wonderful legacy to which I became entitled in such an extraordinary manner?

A

I have been a lonely woman so long that perhaps it may seem curious that I have no wish to find some one of my own kith and kin upon whom to lavish the affection with which all women are supposed to be endowed; but I have no such feeling, and if I had, it seems to me that there may, even yet, be some other persons whose claim to the wealth which I hold would be greater than that of my own kindred.

But enough of myself. I have promised to write down, as plainly as possible, the chain of events which transformed me from an hospital nurse into a woman of property.

It was only a very few weeks ago that my career as a nurse terminated in a manner so strange that, even now, at times it seems as though it were all a dream, and that presently I shall wake up and find myself in my hospital uniform, attending to my patients in the West Ward, and wondering when the next nurse will appear to relieve me.

Only one thing more I wish to say before I begin my task. If in the future these pages should be read, and the reader recognise Adam Varney, I wish to place on record that, in spite of the things he told me—and which I will try to faithfully re-tell—in spite of his roughness, his horrible ravings, his dreadful imprecations, and the intemperate habits which had doubtless led up to his being brought to the hospital, I believe him to have been a brave and gallant man, and, if any who loved him when he was young should

recognise him and grieve for the sad ending of his wild and eventful life, I tell them now that, pitiful as his death was, marred and wasted as he was physically and mentally, yet, I believe from my heart that, ere he died, he had repented of his sins, and that he breathed his last in the sure and certain hope that in another and better world, he would rise again, cleansed from his sins by the mercy of God and the sacrifice at Calvary. . . .

My friend Dr. James Ascott has read this introduction, and has said in his kind way, ‘that it would be as well not to be *too* diffuse.’ I know he thinks I have written too much about myself, but I cannot alter it now, for I am unaccustomed to writing and find it tedious—it must stand as I have written it.

I was sitting in the West Ward by one of the patients, a big, bronzed, bearded man, who had from the first attracted my attention, partly owing to his enormous stature, and the dreadful scars upon his head and breast, partly because, now and then, in his delirium, he spoke the homely dialect with which I was familiar in my girlhood, but more than all, because he wore around his neck a collar of pure gold, which, even in his sleep, he incessantly fingered.

It was welded together by some ingenious means, so that it was impossible to tell without close scrutiny where the junction had been effected. It was about a quarter of an inch in breadth and very heavy; all round

the lower part of his throat were terrible festering sores, with scars here and there telling of other sores since healed up.

When the man was first brought to the Hospital he was insensible. I was present when the Doctor examined him; from the appearance of his neck the Doctor considered that the collar had been on for several years, and owing to its tightness there might be some difficulty in removing it.

It was while the Doctor was speaking of this to one of the students that the man recovered consciousness, and broke into a torrent of strange oaths and exclamations—chiefly in a language which none of us understood, but of which it was easy to imagine the import from his looks and gesticulations. Later on, as he gained more complete comprehension, he swore at the Doctor in English words of such terrible and blasphemous character, that I would have moved away had I been free to do so.

The Doctor soothed him at last, and assured him that there was no intention of removing the collar—indeed, in any case, as I learned afterwards, it would have been of little avail, for he was sinking fast and could not live many weeks.

He was dying from alcoholic poisoning.

As I sat reading by my patient on the second day after his admittance, he suddenly awoke, and I gave him a drink. As he handed me back the glass he thanked me in a far milder tone than any he had yet

used, and I noticed that when I resumed my reading he looked at me in a strangely wistful way.

I had been reading the Psalms—(for since my trouble—since my husband died—I have been what they call a religious woman), and thinking my patient might be soothed by my reading them aloud, I went on without altering my position, or shewing that I had noticed his looks.

‘ Send Thine hand from above ; rid me, and deliver
me out of great waters, from the hand of strange
children. . . . ’

The man made a sudden gesture as of despair, and tried to rise in his bed, but he was too weak. I leaned over him and smoothed his pillow, regretting that I had disturbed him. He seemed to have caught the verse up and to have remembered it, for he muttered to himself brokenly, ‘ *Out of the great waters—the great waters ! . . . and the strange children !* ’

Then in a frenzy of rage he called down the most awful curses upon the great waters and the strange children, and upon one whom he called Ira—as he mentioned her his face grew distorted, the veins of his neck filled out like great cords above the curious collar, and his eyes assumed a greenish blue tint such as is seen in some cases of madness.

I was vexed with myself for disturbing him, and was deliberating as to whether I would call the charge nurse, but as I moved away the paroxysm left him,

and he fell back on his pillow exhausted and almost breathless.

I hoped he had forgotten the verse, but presently he began again his deep-voiced mutterings, and I heard him say in a solemn tone, '*Send Thine hand from above! Let Thy light shine upon the altar—upon the great white stone.*'

He frightened me—in spite of his weakness I was afraid of him as he lay there gaunt, scarred, and terrible in his wrath; but his mood changed, and lifting his eyes to mine as I hung, undecided, over him, he smiled as though divining my fear, and in a gentle manner asked my name.

'Isabel!' he said quickly. 'I knew an Isabel once—ay—in amongst the great waters, in the hand of strange children.'

I thought he was wandering, but he must have known that I did so, for he laughed softly.

'I will tell you about her,' he said; 'shall I?'

I assented readily, for the other patients were all quiet, and there was no likelihood of interruption for a while—besides, I was interested in the man.

And this is what he told me—then, and in the days which followed.

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY

'My name is Adam Varney: all through my life I have been fond of travel and adventure, and when I

was quite a lad I determined that somehow or another I would gratify my inclinations, and see the strange peoples and lands of which I had heard and read.

‘ My father was head-keeper to Squire Haydon of Haydon Hall in Somersetshire. Mother died when I was four years old.

‘ When I grew tall and strong enough the old Squire let father take me on as under-keeper. The old man was glad enough to get me under him, where he could watch me, for I was a wild and reckless youngster, and a regular born poacher. However, I liked what little I saw of a keeper’s life ; there was plenty of fun one way and another, but I did not stick at it long, for the young Squire came up from London one day in some awful trouble, and it got about amongst us that he was going to foreign parts till the trouble blew over. It was something about a girl ; I never heard the rights of it, and neither the old Squire nor the young one was given to talking of their affairs.

‘ One day, up in the gun-room, father let out that young Haydon was going to South Africa on a hunting trip.

‘ One of the gentleman guests had given me an old book that was written by a fellow named Gordon Cumming, it was all about South Africa—about hunting lions and buffaloes, blesbok and wildebeest, and scores of other animals, I had read it through time after time, and dreamt of the grand sport he must have had, and wished I could go to Africa. Cumming must have been

a rare good shot and a cool fellow, but I was pretty good at shooting, and my head was set on fairly level, I guessed I could hold my own if I got a chance, and I was always picturing to myself the wild country and the Kafirs, the veldt with the lions moving about, the great forests where the elephants were, and the glorious excitement of a hunter's life.

'When father let out that the young Squire was off to the country I had dreamed about so often, I just shut my mouth tight and went on cleaning the gun-barrel, and thinking hard all the time how I could manage to get away with Mr. Haydon.

'While I was thinking, he came into the room quietly and spoke to father and nodded to me; he was looking very ill and unhappy, and seemed listless-like and absent; presently he went out, and I dropped the gun-barrel and followed him.

"Hullo, Adam!" he said, when he heard me coming; "do you want me?"

'I told him straight out that I'd heard he was going to the great game country in South Africa that I'd been dreaming of for years, and then I asked him plain if he would take me with him, as his servant.

'He was only a slim, delicate young fellow, with white hands and pretty blue eyes like a girl's, and his head wasn't higher than my shoulder, but he was a regular little gentleman, and plucky as a gentleman should be; he laughed just a bit, and looked at me as if he was wondering whether I would do for a servant,

so I began to explain how much I wanted to go, and promised I would serve him faithfully if he would take me.

‘ Every one said I was too independent to keep my billet as an under-keeper long, and I was afraid that was what he hesitated about, so I swore I’d be very obedient and alter my rough ways if he’d consider it.

‘ He laughed again in his quiet way and stood there looking at me, at last he said—

“ You seem very much in earnest, Adam, and I should like to have a home face about me—yours more than any, my lad. I’ll see my father about it.”

‘ I heard afterwards the old Squire was dead against my going, for he said I was too wild and reckless to be depended upon, and too self-willed for a body-servant, but the young Squire only smiled—I don’t think he ever laughed loudly or merrily again after his trouble—and said he had taken a fancy to me; and so, after a bit, it was all settled, and we left Haydon Hall for good early in April.

‘ We had some fine times, and I got to care for the young Squire very much, he was so plucky and determined; he never owned up to being tired, and the cool head he had in times of danger was something wonderful. Many a time I’ve seen him within an inch of being killed, and when it was all over, he’d turn round with his quiet smile and say, “ A near thing, Adam, eh ? ”

‘ Poor young fellow ! he had six months’ splendid hunting, and then he got laid low with fever. The Kafirs and I got him down as far as Delagoa Bay, and

hoped to be able to get a steamer from there to Natal, but he was too bad, and all the nursing in the world wouldn't have saved him. I don't think he cared much whether he died or not, for he never got over the trouble that drove him from England.

'Well, the young Squire died in that damned Portuguese village, and we buried him by the Sandhills just nor'-west of the town, on the left of the track leading to the Komati. There was an Irishman at Lorenzo Marquez—the only other white man there—for I never counted those beggarly Portuguese as white fellows. He had got into trouble with the authorities and was under a sort of arrest, but it was not very strict; they let him wander about the town all day and locked him up at night. I forget his name now, but they called him "Pat," and he was a good fellow, he helped me bury the young Squire, and afterwards he and I made a rough gravestone and put it up. I wrote the words and Pat cut them roughly with a stone chisel and a hatchet. We had an old newspaper which gave us a hint about the wording, and we put—

IN MEMORY
OF
LIEUTENANT LINDSAY CARROLL HAYDON
OF HAYDON HALL, SOMERSET, ENGLAND
AGED 26
DIED OF FEVER CAUGHT AT MASIBI
AT REST

‘After the young Squire’s death I walked across country to the Pilgrims’ Rest goldfields and tried digging for a spell, then I went to Kruger’s Post and on to Leydenberg. At this place I got a billet as bullock driver, and for a couple of years I stuck to that, driving all over the Transvaal and from Newcastle as far north as Marabastadt.

‘I was on my way to Marabastadt for the second time when I fell in with an Englishman, Captain Clayton; he had come out from England very many years before on a hunting trip and had his headquarters at Eerstelling, a little settlement where gold was said to have been discovered, but it did not seem to pay, for the mines were not being worked when I was there.

‘Captain Clayton was a man after my own heart, he could speak the Kafir dialects as well as the Kafirs themselves, knew the names of every bug and beetle and tree and shrub in the colony, and could tell all sorts of anecdotes about the different properties of the leaves and roots; he was a great hunter too, and had some magnificent trophies in his comfortable stone house at Eerstelling. I was never tired of hearing his yarns of the habits and customs of the Kafir tribes; he knew the meanings of all their symbols, and often made me stare by comparing their ways with those of the Bible people.

‘I had not been brought up religiously. Father was a rough, stern man, and mother had died when I

was young, so I had little Bible teaching, still I had heard about those things in Church, and at meetings sometimes, and it used to make me feel quite strange to hear Captain Clayton say in his authoritative way—

“See that woman grinding corn, Adam? that’s just the way they were grinding it thousands of years ago when Pharaoh ruled over Egypt, and Israel was held in bondage!” I remembered about the two women grinding corn, and the one was to be taken and the other left, and said hesitatingly—

“But those Bible-women, Captain! they wouldn’t be squatting half naked grinding corn *like that?*” I would say—

“Ay, just like that, on just such a scorching day as this, with just such bare silent plains lying before them, and just such a herd of goats and sheep standing listlessly about beneath the mimosas. Picture them, Adam!”

‘But I could not! it seemed almost wicked of him to compare those women whose names are in the Bible with the black chattering women from the neighbouring kraal. I did not know till long afterwards that Captain Clayton had devoted a great portion of his life to discovering the ways and speech of the different Kafir tribes, or that he had a theory that they retained the manners and customs of the earliest of the earth’s inhabitants.

‘Only about a year or so before I met him his two young daughters had come out to live with him.

They had been with some grand relation in England—their grandfather, I think; but one of them—the eldest girl—began to lose her health, and the doctors recommended that she should go to a warmer climate for a while. The Captain was just starting on a hunting trip when he got the news; he went straight back to England, and after a time brought both girls to Natal, for they were too fond of each other to be separated. The Captain had a nice lady to look after them, and the invalid—Miss Isabel—soon grew well and hearty. The girls enjoyed themselves in the new country, but the Captain pined for the wild life, and by degrees they found that out and persuaded him to take them to Pietermaritzburg, and then farther and farther north, enjoying the camping out and the gipsy life. By degrees, seeing no harm came of it, he pushed on as far as Eerstelling, and made that his headquarters.

‘The eldest girl was about eighteen, the other about three or four years younger, a merry, frolicsome child, full of fun and nonsense. Her name was Kate, and I often saw her; but the elder girl kept her room while I was there, being unwell.

‘The Captain was going on a big hunting expedition beyond the Victoria Falls, and he and I often talked of the grand hunting he would enjoy. He would have taken me with him, but I had a team of oxen and a wagon of my own by that time, and had signed for the delivery of a load of hides in Pietermaritzburg,

and had to stick to my bargain. It was a great temptation; for the old longing for hunting never left me, and I was always dreaming of making a big trek on my own account, but in the meantime I had to work hard and save more money.

'When my wagon was loaded up and fairly started, I left my Kafir, Methlembomvu (red-eyes), in charge, and rode across from Marabastadt to Eerstelling to bid Captain Clayton and Miss Katie good-bye. They were very kind to me, and Miss Katie was full of jokes about my journey south with my "old skins," as she called the hides. Both she and Captain Clayton rode out a couple of miles from the village with me to see that I did not take the wrong road and go back to Marabastadt—so Miss Katie said, in fun.

'There was one thing she told me that rather astonished me; she said that she and her sister Isabel had nearly made the Captain promise to take them on his hunting expedition; the Captain looked rather put out when I questioned him; but I could see that the girls had him at their apron-strings, for he was so fond of them both, that he had not the heart to refuse them anything.

"What fun it will be!" Miss Katie said, jumping up and down in her saddle. "Think of the nights when the camp fire is burning and the lions are roaring! and then one fine night Isabel and I will be peeping out of the curtains of the wagon watching father and the boys (Kafirs) smoking round the fires, and father will be

dreaming about some beautiful beetle with purple wings and creepy-crawly eyes, when suddenly a *lion* will spring out of the bushes and stand wagging his tail, and glaring at father—then before the men can move, *Bang!* and over he goes! shot by *ME!*”

“You impudent hussy,” the Captain cried, “as if you could shoot a lion!”

“Of course I could! couldn’t I, Adam?”

‘She was only a slip of a girl and always called me Adam or Goliath,—Goliath because I was so big. Ah, she was a merry, winsome little lass! and I could not wonder at the Captain’s wanting to have her with him, but I could not help thinking it was dreadfully imprudent of him to think of taking two young girls so far from any civilisation; but I did not say much, for the Captain had a way of putting people down, when he chose, which was not agreeable, so I hoped for the best, and wished them good-bye and a pleasant expedition.’

CHAPTER II

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

'I HAD a pretty fair journey down to Maritzburg, and from there went on to Durban, and loaded up with a fresh lot of things for Eerstelling a few weeks later, but the up-trip was a hard one and the bullocks were poor, so we were a long time doing the trek. The first thing I heard from the canteen-keeper was that Captain Clayton had returned *without his daughters*, and was nearly out of his mind.

'I met him the same afternoon down at the blacksmith's shop. He was dreadfully altered: his hair was thickly streaked with grey, and his eyes were sunken and bloodshot as though from want of sleep: directly he saw me he came up and shook hands, and asked me to accompany him on his search for his lost children.

'I had not heard that he was going back for them, and told him so.

"Great God!" he cried, "do you think I am going to leave my darlings to drag out lives of unspeakable misery, or die unavenged at the hands of the treacherous devils who stole them!"

'He could not understand at first that I knew

nothing of what had happened, except the bare fact that he had returned without his daughters; I begged him to be calm and tell me all that had happened; but he would not speak before the blacksmith, so I went with him to his house, which looked so lonely and deserted now without saucy little Miss Katie darting about.

‘ Sitting there in the darkened room—for the windows had been boarded up when he went away, and had not since been altered—he told me his story.

‘ Sixteen days after passing the Victoria Falls, he had been travelling over a wide and apparently boundless plain, for in no direction except that from which they had come was there any break in the dull monotony of flat, treeless desert—nothing but the interminable sand.

‘ Towards night he had suddenly become aware of something unusual in the landscape, and scanning the horizon saw the outlines of an immense mountain range faintly outlined against the darkening sky. He called the attention of the rest of the party to the sight, and they were struck with amazement, for during the daytime there had been no sign of the mountains.

‘ Perplexed, but not in any way alarmed at this sudden apparition, the Captain halted soon after with the intention of exploring some parts of the range on the morrow. But when the sun rose next day, the range was invisible, nor could they detect anything

in the direction from which it had appeared, except the long yellow sweeps of the sandy desert.

'Of course the Captain put the affair down to the mirage, and gave the matter little heed, but towards the afternoon when they were slowly making their way northward, the sky became overcast and rain appeared threatening. A shout from one of the vore-loupers attracted the Captain's attention while he was giving instructions to outspan, and turning in the direction to which the boy pointed, he saw again the great range looming full in sight, its ridges cragged and battlemented in fantastic shapes.

'At this second appearance one of the Kafir drivers appeared to be possessed with fear, for with distended eyes and trembling limbs he sought the Captain and begged him to trek homeward with all speed, for that they were without doubt in the land of the Umganowie, or Magic Mountains, which no man ever saw thrice without paying for his curiosity, and the penalty was death,—sudden, awful, and inevitable.

'Partly from this man and partly from his companions, Captain Clayton learned that they had heard from traders and hunters of a mysterious desert, far inland, where every now and then there uprose from the bowels of the earth a great range of mountains, called by the inhabitants of the adjacent regions the Umganowie or Magic Mountains, and they were not really mountains at all—only the great Ama-Sequ or Devil raising himself from Hell to devour those who had

the temerity to trespass on his garden; and the sandy desert was the garden of Ama-Sequ, and the yellow sands which drifted for all time hither and thither were the dried-up souls of his victims.

‘To a man of Captain Clayton’s temperament this was enough to set him off straight away to discover the cause of this strange optical delusion, for such he judged it to be; and on the third day after entering the desert the caravan headed due east, greatly to the consternation of the Kafirs, who indeed were only prevented from desertion by their fear of the Captain, who threatened to shoot any man who attempted to leave the camp.

‘Two days’ more travelling, during which they had at long intervals,—and only when the sky was overcast—three or four opportunities of seeing the Magic Mountains, brought them at last, at about sundown, to the foot of the Umganowie, which as the Captain now began to suspect were, after all, no phantoms, but *bona fide* mountains which, possibly owing to some peculiarity in the rocks, were invisible when the sun shone upon them, but which lost their peculiar attributes when the sky was clouded.

‘The morning after reaching the foot of the range, Captain Clayton and his daughters stood admiring the solemn grandeur of its towering sides when Miss Katie’s quick eyes detected a small white animal moving about the top of the mountain just above them. At first the arduous nature of the climb sub-

dued even the Captain's sporting instincts, but after watching the animal for some time he determined to have a shot, if possible, and set out to climb the steep and rocky sides of the range. It had appeared a difficult task at the beginning, but ere he was half-way up he began to think it an impossible one, for in places the rocks rose up perpendicularly thirty or forty feet, with neither shrub nor grass growing in the crevices to aid the climber.

'It took him fully four hours to reach the summit, and then the object of his pursuit was not in sight, but he scarcely gave a second thought to that, for at his feet, hemmed in by two great spurs which sprang from the parent range, there lay a beautiful little valley, triangular, with the base almost exactly below him.

'Over the spur to the right came thundering from the main range a mass of foaming, churning water, which shot over the face of the right spur and formed a waterfall, the roar of which he could plainly hear.

'Without wasting time in searching for the quarry which had been the means of his ascending the range, Captain Clayton rapidly descended, inspanned the wagons and trekked north, skirting the mountains in hope of finding a pass leading to the unknown falls.

'After travelling along the sandy plains the rest of that day and part of the next, they suddenly came to the end of the range, which terminated in a large bluff :

rounding it they travelled over somewhat better country, and after passing a belt of mimosa, struck a grassy but waterless plain traversing this and two low spurs, they crossed a small river and pitched their camp on the south bank about half a mile from the falls. The first night in camp was passed safely, and the cattle for the first time for many days enjoyed a luxuriant feed. The place appeared to be an absolute solitude. During the morning the Captain and his daughters strolled down to the falls and found them far more imposing than they had expected.

‘ The Kafirs were within sight, some working about the camp, and others close by on the river bank washing ; so that when Captain Clayton presently proposed walking round to find an opening to the valley and leaving the girls at the falls he had no doubt in his mind that they were absolutely safe.

‘ As he rounded the northern claw he turned and waved his hands to them, and crossing the two low rises made his way into the grass plain, keeping close in to the foot of the mountains. Another half-mile walk brought him to a narrow ravine beyond which he found the triangular valley he had seen from the peaks of the western range. To the east, and forming the back of the cross spur, over which the falls descended, were scores of shallow caves, some apparently cut out of the solid rock and some natural. None of them were more than a few feet deep, nor though the Captain climbed a considerable way up the cliffs could he find

any of respectable length, though many of them were fairly lofty. They seemed to run in tiers, and overlooked the valley in every direction.

'The grass in the valley was cropped fairly short, and there were numerous tracks of goats, which led the explorer to think that possibly his quarry of two days before had been one of those animals.

'Pleased with the aspect of the place, he searched for a considerable time for water, meaning in case of success to establish his camp in the valley itself; but his search was unsuccessful, and at last he returned to the falls to rejoin his daughters.

'The girls were not where he had left them, but as he had been away far longer than he expected, their absence did not much surprise him. Strolling up to the camp the utter stillness of the place suddenly startled him. The wagons were as he had left them, the smoke from the camp-fire curled lazily upwards, but of the girls or Kafirs there was no sign.

'A thrill of apprehension came over him, and he hastened forward and searched in the waggons without result; standing on one of them he swept the southern plain with his glass, but there was no living thing upon its gleaming sandy surface: to the north-west he saw the cattle grazing on the plain, and thinking the girls may have set out to join him and overlooked the ravine, he hurried off in the direction of the trek oxen. The big brutes were all feeding quietly enough, but there was no sign of the girls nor of the Kafirs: once more

he hastened back to the camp, his heart full of forebodings of evil ; the camp was still deserted.

‘ Back again to the falls, he searched high and low for some trace—there was only the one outlet, and yet he could find no spoor travelling from it except his own. On the two sides the black cliffs shot up almost perpendicular to great heights, on the third the falls, like a great white fan, covered the face of the rocks. Calling all his woodcraft up to his aid, he searched and searched inch by inch from the block of stone on which he had left them sitting on the left hand of the rock ; about a yard away, he found a small black ribbon, which Isabel had worn in her hair, a little farther on where the rocks were closer to the falls, and covered with moss in places, he found a large tuft of the moss forced off, and still closer, almost within reach of the spray, was a shoe—Isabel’s.

‘ The most minute search failed to detect any other sign, the waters fell sheer from the cliff, and in spite of their noise the volume was not great, and the pool at the bottom of no great depth ; the stream splashed and tumbled for a short distance along the gully, but at the end it subsided into a quiet, sober little river, neither deep nor very rapid. It seemed impossible that the girls could have come to harm in it, more especially as the Kafirs were washing at the drift.

‘ The absolute disappearance of *all* his companions was so strange and unaccountable that Captain Clayton did not know what to do ; the sun was sinking when

he returned at last to the camp. After repeatedly diving into the pool, he was quite sure that the girls had not fallen in, for he had thoroughly explored the small sheet of water. In any case he knew Katie to be an expert swimmer, and was sure that she could easily have saved both herself and her sister had either or both of them fallen in.

'The fire had burned out, the food in the pot had all caked on to the sides, a sudden desolation seemed to have fallen over the spot, and the Captain's heart was like lead as he set about preparing a simple meal. Too old a soldier not to know that food was necessary to enable him to do whatever might be necessary, he forced himself to eat and drink sparingly. As he sat slowly consuming his meal, and vainly endeavouring to form some plan, his eyes detected a movement in the mimosa scrub to the right. It was the slightest of signs, and such as perhaps he would not have noticed had not every sense been strained to the utmost.

'He could not say what it was—possibly a stray trek ox or an antelope moving among the trees, but whatever it was he kept his eye upon the spot, and, rifle in hand, moving cautiously almost due north over the low hills, he lay at last upon the ridge of the farther one and looked down into the scrub.

'The light grew more dim and no sign came till just as he was about to move; then, just below him, from the shelter of the trees, there emerged a black face, from which two wild scared eyes peered nervously

hither and thither. Re-assured by the silence, the owner of the face presently left the scrub, and with a final glance around began creeping stealthily towards Captain Clayton’s hiding-place.

‘ As he came nearer and nearer the Captain recognised him as Y’gat, his head-driver, and the most trusted of all his men, except Dick the Hottentot. The man drew so close at last, that he could hear his hurried breathing and note that he was absolutely trembling all over with fear.

“ Y’gat ! ” he said softly.

‘ The man uttered no sound, with staring eyes and shaking limbs he looked towards the voice.

“ Y’gat, come here, sir ! ” Captain Clayton said, still in a low tone, for the man’s evident terror began to unnerve him. “ What is it ? Where are the Inkosikasis (ladies) ? ”

‘ Drawing himself up close to his master, the trembling wretch cowered before him, and in his own language, with many gestures and signs told his story.

“ I was washing the Baas’ shirts at the drift with Kleinboy and Dick ; Seruli, Mepach, and Klemzic were up at the waggon, and the young ladies we could see by the big water. Dick and Kleinboy went into the river to bathe. I took the Captain’s shirt up to the waggons to dry, and Seruli went with me afterwards to get wood in the scrub. Klemzic made dinner ready, but the young ladies did not come. We waited : the boys had their skoff. When it was long past

tiffin time for the Baas, I went down to the big water to tell the young ladies. When I got inside the gully, I looked and they were sitting close to the water; next as I stepped over the stones, I heard them cry out, and three devils came out of the big water and picked them up—they screamed 'Oh, Y'gat! Y'gat!' and I was sorry for them; but the big devils, tchoo!—they were gone! right into the big waters with the Inkosikasis."

'He bent his head tremblingly before the Captain and waited.

"What were the devils like, Y'gat?"

"Big black devils, big like trees!" Y'gat made a gesture descriptive of immense personages.

"Bigger than Maparie?" the Captain asked, mentioning the biggest man in his train.

"Maparie!—Maparie is but a little child by the side of the big devils . . . no taller than their knees!"

'Without ridiculing his story the Captain questioned him until it grew dark; then taking the frightened fellow with him to camp, they retired beneath a wagon to get a little rest alternately, for though the Captain did not credit all the story, he feared some of it at least was true.

'He passed a terrible night. The thoughts of his children's probable fate pursued him in a thousand shapes, drawing from him at times inarticulate groans of sheer misery, which chilled the very marrow in Y'gat's bones to hear.

'At dawn a slight hope sprang into the Captain's breast as he saw Maparie coming towards the wagons from the north. The big fellow looked rather cowed, but did not show nearly such abject fear as Y'gat had exhibited . . . the cause was soon ascertained; taking advantage of his master's absence, he had purloined a small bottle of Geneva or 'square face.' It was his duty to herd the cattle for the day, but knowing they would not stray from the pasturage he had left them to themselves, and having finished the bottle fell into a drunken slumber, from which he had only awakened a short while before . . . Making straight for the river to obtain water to quench his thirst, he had observed that none of his comrades were about the camp, as was usual at that time, and he conceived the brilliant idea of propitiating the Captain by making the fire up and bringing him his morning cup of coffee: also he explained he hoped to get the young ladies on his side by the same attention.

'Putting by the theft, the Captain desired Y'gat to tell his comrade what had passed. Maparie smiled. "He—" he said, pointing to Y'gat—"He funk!—Maparie bring young ladies back!"

'He sprang up and slapped his chest vauntingly, and looked around. "Kleinboy, Dick, Seruli, Y'gat Mepach, Klemzic, all run!" he said with a sneer: "fetch my assegai, you skellum!" he added to Y'gat, contemptuously.

'His comrade did as he was bid, and the big man

examined the edge carefully, before he set out with the Captain. "I shall kill them, these three big devils, Y'gat!" he cried, as he followed in his master's track.

'Y'gat made a gesture of derision, and crawled on top of the wagon to watch their venture. He saw them reach the falls: search long and carefully, then while Captain Clayton hunted along the south spur and round to the drifting sandy desert, he saw Maparie take the opposite direction, and get nearly level with the drift, close in by the cliffs, and so on the slopes of the low hills. Then suddenly a black cloud seemed to spring up, and a terrible cry floated through the air. Y'gat trembled as he lay upon the tarpaulin-covered wagon. Again the cry rang out, a cry of intense agony: then a silence, and when Y'gat lifted his head again, Maparie could be dimly seen standing apparently close in to the cliffs.

'Y'gat watched him, fascinated. He had a somewhat contemptuous opinion of his big comrade's valour—had he now indeed killed one of the big devils? and were these devils only black men like himself after all?

'Y'gat got courage. What Maparie could do, he too would surely be able to manage. Taking his assegais and knobkerrie in his hand, he sped rapidly down to the drift, meeting Captain Clayton as he did so. In hurried words he told how Maparie had killed one of the devils, and together they hastened onward.

'With his back to the cliff, and pinned through each shoulder with an immense assegai, whose points were jammed into the rocks behind, Maparie gazed at them through blood-filmed eyes. He was almost disembowelled, a great gash extending from his chest to the abdomen, and through one bleeding hand was thrust the assegai which he had sharpened, ere he set out.

'Y'gat gave a shrill cry and bounded off to the wagons. The Captain stood aghast with horror. As he stared Maparie shuddered convulsively; his pinioned hand made a faint gesture, and the filmy eyes set for ever.

'Bending down, the Captain examined the spoor of the murderer. He appeared to have emerged from the cliff itself, for there were only a few footmarks, all of enormous size; but there was no sign of a cave or other means of egress—the cliff towered up almost perpendicularly—no man could climb it.

'Beside himself with grief, amazement, and rage, he lingered for two days regardless of danger to himself; but search as he might, he found no clew to the girls' disappearance, nor did he see any of the mountain tribe.

'On the third day at dawn, he inspanned the wagons, and started back on his old tracks, bent on raising a party to avenge his loss. As he rounded the bluff, Y'gat and the remainder of the Kafirs came crawling shamefacedly from the mimosa scrub, and resumed their duties.

'That was his story—he asked me to join him, and offered me such a high price for my services and wagons, that I could not refuse—indeed, I would have gone for nothing, sooner than leave bonnie little Katie Clayton's fate unknown.

'There were very few Europeans in Eerstelling or Marabastadt, and none whom the Captain chose to take with him; he was so anxious to return, that in spite of my protestations, he decided that we two, with half a dozen picked Kafirs, would be sufficient for the rescue party. In vain I pointed out the fate of Maparie as an example of the ferocity of the enemy we had to combat with. "Maparie was an infernal coward," he said savagely—"we don't want a crowd."

'Long afterwards I learned that his real reason for taking no other white man than myself, was that he feared that the girls' stories would be such as to make their future lives miserable and wretched, and he wanted no babblers in the party.

'Speaking of the abductors, he admitted that they were probably a big race, but he had got it into his head that they were a cave or underground tribe, and for these people he had a profound contempt.

"Once we find their cursed warrens," he said fiercely, "there will be little fighting—they are not the sort to fight, except with girls or cowardly dogs like Maparie."

'We started very soon after I had met him—within twenty-four hours. In addition to the Captain and

myself we had two of Sepidilli's Kafirs, noted for their woodcraft, and reputedly courageous,—four of Mapoch's men (renegade Zulus), and two pure-bred Zulus, Mahali and Umseeahn; the latter was a cousin of Cetywayo's, a magnificent great fellow, tall, gaunt, and sinewy. He had been driven from his own country by the jealousy of the Zulu king, who saw in him a possible rival.

‘ Besides these men we had the Hottentot Dick who had been with Captain Clayton before, and who begged to be allowed to accompany him on the return journey. I had often seen him with the Captain and knew him to be a smart useful little chap, with a smattering of English, Dutch, Portuguese, and a good all-round knowledge of bush life.

‘ From Eerstelling we trekked away over the Limpopo, past Tati in the Makalala country, then on to the Victoria Falls—“Metse-a-Tunyati” (water sounding) as the Kafirs call them—on the great Zambesi River.

‘ From here we travelled thirteen days, chiefly in an easterly direction, till we came to a vast sandy desert, which we crossed north-easterly. The Captain must have struck out easterly too soon, for after a tedious journey (occasionally—when the sky was overcast—catching glimpses of the Magic Mountains) we made the base of the range, and for nearly a week laboured along in a drifting sandy desert.

‘ We were almost dead with fatigue and want of sleep, when we at last reached a great frowning

bluff of solid rock which formed the end of the range.

'This was the most awful journey I ever had in my life, the sand was so fine that, as the cattle moved over it, it was dispersed in every direction, and formed into a filmy floating sand-cloud. It penetrated everywhere, our eyes and ears were full of it, it covered our clothes and our food ; with every wind that blew fresh particles were gathered into the swirling mass, and both men and cattle suffered severely.

'Passing round the bluff south-easterly across a grassy plain, we came to a small river running from the fork of the range in which the falls were situated.

'The falls were of great height, and the water after falling, swept east by north in a small stream—very insignificant in comparison with the vast volume of water which fell over the cliffs. The roar of the descending water was almost as loud as that of the Victoria Falls.

'From the very first I was puzzled at the curious discrepancy between the mass of water continually pouring over the cliff and the meagre dimensions of the stream which flowed down the valley ; the only theory I could construct to account for it was that there must be an under channel by which most of the water escaped ; but though I spent some time in trying to verify my theory, I was unable to do so.

'There was no sign of life about the place. As far south as the eye could reach loomed the mountain

range, flanked for miles and miles by desert sands on the east, except for the grass plain near the range and a small forest of mimosa, the country was a dead level—sand, sand, sand.

‘ Westward, and facing our camp, were the two great spurs of the range, barren, gloomy, and uncanny; with nothing to break their blank monotony but the silver stream which ceaselessly fell over the junction.

‘ A curious thing about the range was that, although on the westward it was composed of rocks resembling mica, which glistened and glistened in the sun’s rays, the inside of the spurs through which the river ran was dark and gloomy-looking; and it struck me that the vapour from the falls had possibly caused the outer crust to peel off.

‘ I said there was no sign of life; I recollect now that there were several hideous assvogels (carrion eagles) circling in the air when we outspanned; and when we were camped they settled out of reach on the summit of the range, and seemed to watch us like ill-omened fates. Occasionally they flew heavily far overhead, but always returned to the top of the range, as though guarding over the secret we were striving to pierce.

‘ Directly we had outspanned on the first day of our arrival the Captain said—

“ Come here, Adam; I will show you where I found the last traces of my girls.”

'Walking up to within a few feet of the foot of the falls, he showed me a square boulder.

"It was here we found a fragment of Katie's dress," he said; "and as the Kafirs had only an hour's start of us, and I was coming from over there—pointing to the north-west—they could not have come out of the valley unseen, nor could they have scaled those precipitous cliffs—if, on the other hand, they climbed either of the slopes, they must have left some track—but there was none."

'What he said was undoubtedly true, and unless they had flown away, or really disappeared into the falls, as Y'gat had said, I was at a loss to account for their disappearance.

"Would it be possible to walk through the falls?" I hazarded.

'He laughed grimly and pointed to the water—tons of it—falling into the basin below. "Try if you like," he said. His theory was that there must be some underground passage through the hills—probably through the rocky wall where Maparie had met his death, and on this assumption we began our search.

'For two days the Captain, Mahali, Umseeahn, Shala (one of Mapoch's men), Dick, and I tested the rocks shoulder high, while from the plateau, where the camp was, a sentry kept vigilant watch for the enemy; but none appeared, nor did we find any entrance to the mountains. On the third day we tried the inside valley, toiling backwards and forwards

along the tiers among the shallow caves overlooking the valley. The caves were very shallow, and though we searched many we found no trace of habitation.

‘ On the fourth day I searched the outside spur to the southwards, and trudged through the sand-drift till I was dead-tired. At last, being convinced there was nothing to be discovered there, I made my way back to the falls. The day was oppressive, no sign of life gave interest to the scene, the glaring sun dazzled my eyes and scorched my skin. The heat was so intense that my rifle-barrel was too hot to touch.

‘ Utterly dispirited and jaded I went up to the left side of the falls and sat on the stone on which the lost girls had last been seen by their father. I was out of reach of the spray here, and presently I moved closer in—so close that the spray fell thickly about me. Even here it was not cool, but moist and oppressive. Without thinking, I stepped further into the spray, and held up my face that it might fall upon it. How many steps I took I did not know, but presently, as I pressed on, I stumbled and fell upon my knees, and then I became aware of a curious thing. Instead of the great volume of water falling into the basin at my feet and drifting into the river channel, it seemed to fall into a narrow rift or slit at the inside edge of the basin.

‘ I had fallen almost upon the verge of the rift, and close to my face a solid mass of water was falling dully into the abyss.

'Edging farther to the left I found myself at the western end of the rift; round it ran a narrow path about a foot wide.

'Far up the cliffs, and almost directly above my head, were two distinct volumes of water, the greater falling in an unbroken column full into the narrow chasm at my feet; the other, from which all the feathery foam was being thrown, and which we had imagined to be the only fall, fell into the basin, and formed the river whose insignificance had so bewildered me. I have a rough diagram in my pocket-book. I am no artist and I made the diagram from memory, but it will serve to show you what I mean if you do not understand my description.

'The outer volume was much wider than the inner one, and fell in the shape of a fan, quite concealing the second fall, and unless you walked through the spray—and well into it too—you would never guess what lay beyond.

'It did not strike me for a moment that here was a clue to the girls' disappearance. I was struck with the strangeness of it, and, as I stood lost in contemplation, noticed that behind the larger body of water and the face of the falls there was a continuation of the narrow path on which I was standing.

'I followed it up till I got behind the falling water, but here the darkness was such that I could not see my way, and I had to shut my eyes to accustom myself to the gloom. After a bit I could see a little better,

and went cautiously along on my hands and knees till I got, as I guessed, about the centre of the chasm or rift. Standing upright I felt on my left the clammy walls of the cliff, and in a dim way began to recognise its outlines.

‘The longer I looked the better I could see, and presently looking upwards could trace the great shadowy wall of rock which towered into obscurity.

‘Here and there a few slimy weeds grew in the crevices, and as I touched them with my hand I felt an indescribable tremor,—they were so cold and dank, and clung their slimy lengths around my fingers as I investigated them. Passing on still farther with the intention of coming out on the farther side of the chasm, an icy blast of wind struck my body, and my hands no longer rested against the supporting wall of rock. In my effort to steady myself I almost lost my balance, and all but fell back into the gulf behind me. Steadying myself I became aware that I was standing at the mouth of a huge cave, at least thirty feet high and three or four feet wide.

‘It was lighter here, but still the gloom was very great, and my eyes could not at first penetrate it. I had fallen on my hands and knees when I lost my balance, and remained in this position peering into the great vault before me. The current of air which came from the cave blew cold and chill as death full in my face; from the roof of the cave came a never-ceasing spray of icy drops, some of which, caught in the

current of air, blew into my face. A few minutes before, I had been almost stifled in the close footway between the cliff and the falls, now I was shivering with cold which seemed to strike into my very bones.

'It must have been several minutes before the indistinctness of the interior gradually resolved itself into some semblance of form; at first it seemed a vague black cloud—impalpable and horrid, but as I strained my eyes the gloom seemed to grow less and less dense, until at last I could trace the nearer outlines of the cave and its contents.

'As the objects within the great cave grew slowly into shape the sweat broke out upon my body and my heart began to beat in mighty thuds against my breast. I was frightened.

'Sitting, almost within reach of my hand, with his face turned towards the mouth of the cave was a colossal Kafir!

'From his forehead sprang a plume of ostrich feathers, and across his chest was draped a beautiful tiger-skin kaross, there were white plumes hanging from his arms and legs, and against his left knee, which was within a few feet of my face, were propped his assegais, shield, and battle-axe of stone, on the wet slimy floor at his feet was an earthen platter in which the water glistened. With one hand he seemed to be reaching at his throat, and, as I gazed spell-bound at his gigantic figure, I noticed that about his neck *he wore a collar of dull gold!*

‘ He sat very still and silent, and seemed not to have noticed me. As I lay there motionless with surprise, the interior grew gradually more and more distinct, till at last I counted fourteen great Kafirs, all far beyond the size of ordinary men.

‘ There were seven on each side, those nearest me on either side grew after a while fairly distinct, but those farther off were at times mere shapeless shadows. Every now and then a faint fitful light seemed to penetrate the gloom, and by its aid I could see that all the men were attired in the same manner and were of about the same stature as the two great sentinels who sat so silently and grimly at the cave’s mouth within reach of my hand.

‘ Each man seemed sitting in just the same attitude, with his head turned inquiringly towards the entrance. Against each one leaned the gigantic battle-axes and assegais.

‘ All the Kafirs seemed to be reaching to their throats with their right hand, and faintly through the gloom the filmy outlines of the ostrich plumes seemed nodding menacingly and unceasingly at me. Around each dusky breast was draped a tiger-skin kaross, and from each throat there glinted the dull light of the collars of gold.

‘ Only once afterwards in all my life did I feel such fear as thrilled through me as I lay motionless and fearful at the entrance of that horrible place. With the roar of the great waters which fell in sullen

thunder only a foot or two behind me booming in my ears, the terrible Kafirs within a few feet of my face, and the knowledge that the slightest movement might attract their attention, I lost my nerve. For a long time I lay blankly gazing into the great vault, unconsciously photographing each of its fantastic features upon my brain, but I was powerless to move—a deadly fear seemed to hold me as in a vice, and I was helpless with the sheer helplessness of terror.

'After a while a sharp metallic sound reached my ears from the farther end of the cave, and I felt rather than saw dark forms advancing towards the double line of sentries.

'They are coming to change the guards! I thought, and on the instant my brain threw off its lethargy and I began to move quickly and noiselessly backwards till I was again at the end of the narrow path at the top of the rift.

'Once there I sprang to my feet, and dashing madly through the falling spray regained the outer world. It struck me with a sudden blindness coming out of the shadowland of the great falls, and I sat down on the rough boulders and clasped my hands across my eyes till I could bear again to open them. And when I opened them and saw the barren cliff-sides rising on either hand, the great ridge of rock overhead, and the curling smoke from the camp fire on the plateau in front, it seemed as though I had been dreaming, and I was almost doubtful if indeed I had seen the great

cave with its grim, motionless sentries, but presently the thought of the girls came to my mind and I knew that I had at least discovered the abiding place of the abductors, and so with one half-fearful look at the ever-falling waters that hid so well the strange lurking-place of its still stranger inhabitants, I sped down the valley with my news.

CHAPTER III

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

“THANK God!” said the Captain; “we shall have them safe again soon, Adam, my boy.”

‘He was so sanguine! With all his deep researches into the manners of the African races he never seemed to realise that however much he might understand about *them* they could not understand *him*. To them he was a white man who knew much of their customs and spoke their language well, but always to them he must have been an enigma—how could they guess of the visionary dreams which it was his delight to think would some day be verified—those dreams and speculations of his!

‘Even now in his joy and excitement at having at length something like a clew, he could not altogether forget his theories, for, looking up at me from his revolver, which he was excitedly cleaning, he said suddenly—

“I’ve got an idea of the probable origin of these big Kafirs, Adam. There is an old Hebrew MS. at my place at home which I studied years ago, and in

it is a treatise on a tribe of just such great Kafirs as these—the men of Kytoam or Kytoum they, were called.” We had a short discussion as to our tactics: the Captain was all for an immediate advance, but it was now nearly sundown, and I persuaded him to wait till morning so that we could see our way, otherwise I felt sure we should lose our lives on that slippery, narrow ledge without a ray of light to guide us. It had been dark enough in the afternoon with the fierce, hot African sun shining down full on the face of the falling water,—what would it not be when night had fallen?

‘Therefore, I persuaded him to wait patiently for the dawn; and when he had agreed, I sat by him and smoked while he explained the situation to the men.

‘I could only partly understand him, but by the light of the camp fire I could see the Kafirs following his every word and gesture with great intentness.

“And so, boys,” he said at the last, “we will go up in the first light and palaver with them for the white ladies; I will give them plenty of presents then. *But*,” and his voice rose louder and sterner as he spoke, “if they have harmed them—my children—we will go up into the cave and kill them—yes, every one.”

‘Umseeahn lifted his bloodshot eyes to the Captain’s face and with a supreme gesture pointed towards the sky.

“Umseeahn will kill them! like sheep in a kraal!” he said solemnly.

‘Methlembomvu, one of the Mapoch men, rose up.

"Good!" he said, "Methlembomvu has his assegais sharpened!" Then Mahali said a few words to the same effect, and Dick the Hottentot broke the silence.

'He was sitting on the dissel-boom of the wagon eating a grisly bit of meat, and eyeing each of the speakers attentively from time to time.

"Take Dick up cave, Baas?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, Dick; you can come. The Sepidilli men can stay and look after the wagon till we come back."

"Baas won't come back," said Dick decidedly.

"What! why?"

"The black ghosts will eat the white Baas—him too," he said, pointing at me.

"Will they?" said the Captain, grimly, "perhaps they'll eat you too, Dick."

'Dick made a hideous grimace, and went on with his bit of gristle, but his words had set the Captain on another train of thought.

"If they should prove to be a race of cannibals as that lad has suggested, Adam, it will certainly fit in with my theory as advocated in my last article in *Macartney's Magazine*—most decidedly it would give an impetus to the work of exploration as suggested by me in my paper to the *Royal*."

'I never saw such a man as he was; he loved his daughters dearly, but he didn't appear to see that if Dick's surmise was correct, both the poor girls were probably dead long ere now. I got angry with him, and sat silently smoking my pipe against the wheel of

the wagon, while he chattered away to the Kafirs in different dialects. Long after that, when the night was nearly spent, I sat up and drew my blankets closer about me ; the Captain was sitting close by with a pipe in his mouth, and when I moved he turned also.

“Perhaps you don’t know, Adam,” he said kindly, “that Mahali is a good old Biblical name—nearly as old as Adam,” he added with a faint laugh.

‘I had a mind to tell him he was an old fool to worry himself about a lot of names of dead and gone folks, but in spite of my hot temper, I had grown to like the Captain very much, and so, with a muttered reply, drew up my blankets and lay back again as though to sleep.

‘But I watched him furtively all the time, he made such a curious picture as he sat there in the flickering firelight with his short white moustache and bronzed face which grew redder every now and then as he pulled slowly at his pipe—he was such a thoroughly soldierly-looking man. Watching him, the thought came into my mind—how would he fight when the time for fighting came ?

‘The time was not very far off. While the grey mist still hung over the valley, we had breakfasted and prepared to start. I led the way, followed by the Captain, and after him, in Indian file, came, in the order named, Umseeahn, the great Zulu, with his comrade, Mahali, and Mapoch’s men, Methlembomvu,

Bomanzi, Shala, and Mafuti, last of all came Dick, the Hottentot.

'We all had rifles, Captain Clayton and myself having, in addition, six-chambered revolvers, the Kafirs carried their assegais and shields, and in addition Umseeahn had a great club with a piece of iron driven through the head so that it resembled a pick, it was an awful weapon, and heavy, but Umseeahn carried it easily.

'Bomanzi and Mafuti carried two bales of merchandise with which to propitiate the cave-men.

'I took a farewell look at the little camp as we started; the oxen newly loosened from the trek-tow were feeding close by, at the rear of the wagon smouldered the fire round which we had so recently sat, lounging against the dissel-boom and curiously watching our departure were Kleinboy and Tombalie, Sepidilli's boys. As I looked, a shadow fell across me, and turning my eyes upwards I saw the assvogels hovering in mid-air directly above us.

'Slowly we passed up the ravine, for Bomanzi and Mafuti were heavily laden and could not travel fast.

'At last we gained the falls, and beckoning to my companions, I stepped into the spray of the outer fall, and striking the narrow path went cautiously forward. Step by step we wound round the slippery chasm and had got on the inner path against the wall of rock, when suddenly Captain Clayton caught me by the arm. I turned quickly and was just in time to

see Bomanzi fall headlong into the falling column of water. The corner of his bale had caught a projecting ledge of rock and overbalanced him.

'It was so sudden, that even as I looked the descending mass whirled him out of sight—for a second the burden he bore remained in view, but the force of the falling water was so great that like a crumpled leaf the bale crackled and disappeared.

'We stared helplessly at one another—only Dick seemed unconcerned, and squatting close to the brink peered curiously downward, as if expecting to see the victim in its horrible abyss. With one consent we presently moved onward, and at length reached the mouth of the great cave.

'As the others crawled one by one to the opening and ranged themselves, weapon in hand, with only their heads projecting above the floor, I had time to observe the cave again.

'Everything was as I had seen it on the previous day, only the wind seemed icier than ever, and the sleet blew thick and chill. The Kafir sitting nearest me seemed to be the same man I had noticed before, and sat in precisely the same attitude.

'None of the great sentinels had detected our approach, and I waited till the whole of our party were well placed before I spoke to the Captain.

"Will you hail them?" I said.

'But he could not hear me in the sullen roar of the falls, and I had almost to shout to him—fearing all

the time that the sentries would overhear me. But they never stirred—gazing steadily towards us with one hand uplifted they sat motionless and awful in their majestic strength.

“Call to them, Dick,” shouted the Captain as he edged closer still to the cave—“Call them.”

“Mabiti! Mabiti!!” (“Within! Within!!”) cried Dick lustily, but the cave-men neither moved nor spoke.

“*Mabiti! Oh! aye Mabiti!!*” he yelled again, in obedience to the Captain’s orders.

‘Still the great warriors took no heed, and we wondered, for the nearest man was within a few feet of us.

‘Suddenly Shala leaped up with a great shout, “Arcalie, Arcalie,” he cried, pointing inwards with his hand. “*They are the great dead devils—the great dead devils—all of them, Arcalie!*” In his excitement he stumbled on the slippery mouth of the cave, and with his cry “Arcalie” still ringing in our ears we saw him fall back even as Bomanzi had fallen—and we saw him no more. We had no thought of stopping now. With his comrade’s first shout, Umseeahn had stepped into the dim cave.

‘The Captain was the first to follow, shouting to me as he scrambled in: “I believe Shala was right—they are dead. It must be a burial-place.”

‘As he spoke he joined Umseeahn, and with a thrill of shame that the Zulu should have led the way, I

too entered ; while behind me came Mahali, Mafuti, Dick and Methlembomvu.

‘ Standing upright in the cave, the intensity of the cold struck me with amazement. I shivered and shook as the icy draught eddied past me, whirling the ever falling drops into my face and on to my body.

‘ Under foot trickled numberless little threads of water, and I noticed even then that they all seemed to run towards the centre of the cave and there disappear in a sink or hollow.

‘ But the dead men who lined the walls attracted us most.

‘ They were petrified !

‘ We saw that on none of them did the falling spray descend, it seemed to fall only from the centre of the roof and the tight parchment-like skins of the dead men were dry—but cold—with an awful coldness that seemed more horrible than death. As we examined them more closely we discovered that the golden circlet or collar around each man’s neck was attached to a ring firmly fixed in the rock ; it was chiefly by this means that the figures were kept in position, but also we saw that each man had the further hand firmly riveted by a golden band or bracelet to the wall in such a position that the fingers of the hand just reached half way up the throat.

‘ Also on the ground before each man and just beyond reach were placed a calabash and earthen platter. Each of the fourteen figures were of colossal

proportions and over each dead form was draped the tiger-skin Kaross. "By heavens!" cried the Captain, as we gazed with distended eyes at this dreadful sight, "these must be the giant Kings of Ethiopia!"

'Slowly we passed between the rows of warriors until we reached the end of the cave, where it was quite dark.

'The Captain struck a light, but it flickered and went out, and at the same time Dick's voice was heard. "Hi, Baas! here are steps," he said. Guided by the sound of his voice we joined him, groping about with our hands till we made out that there were eight steps running almost perpendicularly from the left-hand corner of the cave. We mounted them slowly and cautiously, and found ourselves in a small square chamber about the size of a sentry box. One of the Kafirs found some other steps as we felt cautiously about in the darkness, and presently we ascended them, they were so wide that Captain Clayton and I could walk abreast.

'As we mounted, the light seemed to come back, and presently from the shelter of the steps we looked into another great cave similar to the one we had just left, but much lighter.

'As in the lower cave, the great falls fell just in front of its mouth.

'On the floor lay gourds, calabashes, and a few karosses similar to those worn by the dead Kafirs below.

‘Lying asleep in the middle of the cave were two great Kafirs more than equal in size to the dead men below. We thought they were dead too, till one of them turned uneasily in his sleep and seemed to mutter to himself in his dream.

‘There was a little rustle at my side as Umseeahn pressed forward with the light of battle in his eyes; in another moment he would have precipitated himself upon the sleeping giants, but with a gesture Captain Clayton warned him back.

‘Luckily Dick’s sharp eyes had discovered still another flight of steps, and stealthily following him we clambered up; they were narrower than the other steps, and there was only width for one man to pass. Dick led the way, myself next, and Captain Clayton last of all, for he had put the Kafirs between us lest they should do anything rash.

‘Presently I heard a loud “Tch-k !” and looking up saw Dick’s wizened face bent down towards me.

“Shut your mouth, Baas !” he said warningly.

‘He had reason to warn me, for we were looking into another cave—but one very different from the others.

‘The floors were carpeted with white goat-skins, from the crannies and crevices of the walls gleamed tusks of ivory and forms of men and animals graven in gold and silver, and carved on ivory and on wood. In the centre of the room stood a rocky font in which some herbs were twining, giving out a fragrance like

incense. At the far end, near the mouth of the cave, stood a motionless figure wrapped from head to foot in a great kaross.

'As Dick and I gazed at the figure some instinct seemed to give warning of our presence, for, throwing back the heavy skin, she turned towards us.

'I say *she*, because the figure was that of a young girl—*and a white one* !

CHAPTER IV

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

‘I HAVE a vague recollection of beckoning Captain Clayton forward—of a clear young voice crying “*Father! oh, Father!*” and then of another form appearing on the scene from a pile of skins and robes, and throwing herself headlong into the Captain’s arms. I recognised *her* easily enough in spite of her paleness, it was pretty little Katie Clayton—but my eyes were all for her sister—for Isabel!

‘I cannot describe Isabel Clayton to you, but until my eyes are closed in death—and that will be ere long—I shall never forget the beauty of her face as I saw it a second later.

‘She was nearly as tall as the Captain, lithe, supple, and beautiful with a beauty surpassing anything I ever dreamt of.

‘As she stood with her great starlike eyes upturned to her father’s face, her beautiful lips slightly parted, her white rounded arms clasped about his neck, and her shapely head held back that she might gain a

clearer view of his face, she looked to me the fairest thing in all the world.

'She was dressed in a long white gown, bound at the waist by a broad girdle; her golden-brown hair fell to her waist, and glinted even in the shadow of that dreary cavern. On her feet I saw she had sandals.

'I had time to notice all this and more, for they stood gazing into each other's eyes for several minutes. Scarcely they seemed to move from the attitudes into which they had fallen when the girl first ran towards him; only that her bosom rose and fell with long-drawn sighs of happiness, and that great tears of joy welled into her glorious eyes and made them brighter yet, one would have sworn they were statues.

'It was Dick who broke the spell.

"'Baas," he said, "let's trek."¹

'At the sound of his voice the Captain turned and led his elder daughter towards us; the younger girl clung to his other arm.

"'Isabel," said the Captain, "this is Adam Varney. We must be grateful to him all our lives, my darling, for it was he who found out where you were hidden."

'She put her little white hand into my great brown palm, and said—

"'I cannot thank you properly—not now, but, oh! when once we get away from here—from these great caves and the great Kafirs, we will thank you then. Katie and I, and *my father* will thank you."

¹ Go on; get away.

‘ She said “*my father*” so proudly and sweetly, poor lassie, and nestled closer still to the Captain, as though she could not yet realise that he was with her once more. I grew hot and cold. I could not answer her, for I was not used to such as she, and her beauty was so rare ! the glory of her face dazzled me, and I crushed her hand roughly in mine and lowered my eyes.

‘ She turned from me, and Miss Katie came and shook hands warmly while the elder girl chattered gaily to Umseeahn and Mahali, and the Captain curiously examined some of the graven figures lying about the cavern. It has taken some time to tell, but in reality it all happened in about five minutes.

‘ The Captain was deeply interested in what he saw, and called to me, but as I moved towards him the Hottentot Dick again spoke.

“ Baas,” he said for the second time, “ let’s trek.”

‘ Methlembomvu, who was standing idly against the wall, gave a guttural assent.

“ Yebo, Baas, hambaka checha ! ”¹ he growled.

“ They’re right, Adam,” said the Captain, “ let us move on.” We passed slowly down the steps and emerged into the lower cavern—as I passed into the gloom my heart stood still.

‘ The two Kafirs were awake !

‘ Sitting at the other end of the cave they were looking out on the falling water, into which one of them was idly tossing fragments of broken rock while

¹ Yes, Baas ; go quickly.

the other lazily chipped other pieces from the wall with the back of his great battle-axe.

'I knew that in the shadow in which I stood I must be invisible to the Kafirs. Dick was next to me, and I drew him forward and told him to communicate with the Captain, and tell him how things were and ask for instructions. I wanted to use my rifle and risk the report being heard, but when Dick came back a moment later he whispered—

"Alright, Baas, Capt'n Baas says don't shoot, skoot across sharp."

'There was small time for consideration, Dick was nearest me and I sent him first.

'He stooped down, and keeping close to the base of the wall wriggled himself across the floor so quickly and noiselessly that he vanished almost as I watched him.

'I turned round to see who was the next man. It was Mafuti, from Mapoch's kraal; without speaking I pointed across the cave and motioned him to follow Dick.

'Mafuti was a big, fine man, almost as big as Umseeahn, but he was a cross-grained fellow, and often had to be humoured—just now I could see he was in one of his obstinate moods, for though he obeyed me he did it sullenly and slowly—long afterwards I learned that he had taken some ornament from the cave above and Captain Clayton had made him replace it; this had roused his ire, and he was like a spoilt child when he

was thwarted. Instead of crouching he stalked slowly half way across the cave, and then stopped; my eyes caught the gleam of the assegais in his hand, and I cursed him under my breath for his foolhardiness, for I guessed he was about to attack the guards.

‘ He stood motionless for about a minute regarding the two great Kafirs at the mouth of the cave, then, with the same slow sulky gait, he accomplished the rest of the journey in safety.

‘ I shook my fist at him in impotent fury for his obstinacy, and though I could not punish him then I promised him in my own mind that if we both got off scot-free, I’d give him something to remember to his dying day.

‘ Methlembomvu (red-eyes) was the next to attempt the journey, and to my relief got across without mishap.

‘ When I turned my head to caution the next adventurer, I saw Miss Katie standing by me, the Captain had muffled her in a dark kaross to hide her light-coloured dress, and she had drawn the skins well over her head. When she caught my eyes she made an impudent little mouth at me, and held up one of her fingers in mock warning. I suppose she had seen me do the same thing to Methlembomvu.

‘ Poor little girl! She was so bright and full of fun that even here her spirits did not desert her! But she was sensible enough under all her larking, for when she passed me and began her journey, there was no

hesitation or nonsense about her, and she stepped lightly and quickly over to the other side.

'Mahali, Umseeahn's comrade, came next, and as he stood for a moment contemplating the two sentinels, I could not help admiring him. With his hard lean face slightly turned to one side, and the hand nearest me outstretched behind him, he was in such a position that I could not fail to notice the magnificent symmetry of his chest and shoulders. As he glared at his unconscious enemies the strong lithe frame seemed to quiver with a wild desire to hurl himself upon them. He was like some wild beast waiting for a fray.

'I touched him on the shoulder, and motioned him to go forward, and he, too, crossed in safety.

'I had no need to turn my head to see who the next comer was. I could feel the perfume of her hair in my nostrils, and my blood was tingling in my veins with a wild wish to fight and die for her there and then; but I did not speak or touch her; only I cast my eyes over her dress to see that she was not likely to attract attention, but the Captain had seen to that, and she was draped from head to foot in the great kaross she had worn in the cave where we had found her.

'I saw her eyes shining steadily and tranquilly under the dark awning of the kaross, and noticed how very white was the hand which held the folds under her chin, and then she stepped past me.

'Heavens! how my heart surged, and leaped, and

stood still as she moved onwards! But I need have had no fear, for even the wonderfully quick passage Dick had made was nothing to the rapid glide which took the young English girl into safety.

‘And now only the great Zulu, Umseeahn, with the Captain and myself were left.

‘I motioned the Captain to go, but he shook his head and pointed at me.

‘I would not go, and so Umseeahn went. The Zulu had taken but one stride when one of the sentinels came slowly from the cave-mouth towards where we stood; he was apparently watching something crawling on the cave-walls, for every now and then he prodded the rocks with a huge assegai. He came closer and closer, and the strain became almost unbearable. I had my rifle ready, but when I motioned to take aim, the Captain laid his hand on my arm and restrained me.

‘The Kafir got within about six feet of Umseeahn, and it seemed as if he could not help discovering him, but I suppose the light was bad, and he feared to lose the quarry, and just as I thought discovery inevitable, the Kafir gave a vicious prod at the wall, and brought down his assegai with a curious-looking lizard transfixed to the point. The reptile was almost white, and looked very uncanny.

‘The Kafir loosened the lizard from his weapon, and with a parting stab at its flat white upturned belly, he lazily sauntered back to his companion.

' When I withdrew my eyes from him, Umseeahn was just disappearing.

' The Captain was the next to go, and he had got safely to the centre, when I saw him stop and hesitate. A moment later he crouched down, and gradually extended himself towards the dead lizard.

' He was just going to seize it when the same sentinel came a second time towards us, and at the same moment the Captain stretched out his hand ; the Kafir looked downwards in search of the lizard, and saw the recumbent figure.

' With a wild blood-curdling cry that rang loud above the roar of the falling waters, and echoed again and again through the caverns above and below us, he sprang forward.

' I had my rifle handy ; as he sprang forward I fired, and he finished his wild war-cry with a dull gurgle as he fell to the ground at my feet.

' At the same instant, and before I could reload or draw my revolver, the other Kafir came to his comrade's assistance, brandishing the great axe with which he had been chipping the rock.

' As he came, I sprang out of the shadow and grappled with him.

' I am a big man, but nothing in point of strength to what I then was ; but, strong as I was, the great Kafir swung me to one side with ease, and with another wild cry raised his axe and struck at me.

' Here, where the white scar is, that is where he

struck me, cleaving through the rifle belt and buckle, and bringing me heavily to the ground.

‘ It was a dreadful blow, and I thought I was dying, but even then as I fell, I felt a wild thrill of exultation as I saw Umseeahn the Zulu throw himself headlong on my enemy, and heard the report of the Captain’s rifle ring through the air, then in a whirl of many echoes that rose and fell, and rose and fell again, I seemed to lose all consciousness, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was lying in a stone crib or basin cut in the solid rock, which formed the sides of a vast quadrangular hall. From the floor upwards the rocky walls were perpendicular to a height of fifteen or sixteen feet, and then gradually arched inwards, till far overhead they formed a gigantic dome, from apertures in which bright shafts of sunlight came dancing fitfully into the semi-darkness below.

‘I say semi-darkness, but that hardly describes what I mean; it was light enough to see plainly, but the light was subdued, and the general impression was similar to that experienced in a cathedral. Captain Clayton used to call it the “cloistered gloom,” and though perhaps I do not quite understand all he meant, the expression seems somehow to convey what I wish to explain.

‘In the centre of the floor—which appeared to be paved with large flat slabs—rose a square white marble dais or altar, with steps leading to its summit, which

was about ten feet above the level of the floor, and from which a faint blue smoke curled lazily upwards, wafted now and then into fanciful wreaths and forms as it encountered the currents of air which came from the crevices above.

‘ I was so weak and faint that I noticed only this, and fell back tired and puzzled in my rocky crib; my chest was cramped and painful, and my limbs strangely weak, and as I fell back there was a strange surging noise in my ears.

‘ As I closed my eyes, faint with the effort I had made in sitting up, soft cool fingers flitted about my throat and neck, and then a cloth was removed, and another, saturated with some cold refreshing liquid, was gently placed upon my aching chest; then a scent charged with an odour like orange-blossom was sprinkled on my face and head, and a cool current of air played upon my beard and hair.

‘ I lay there content, with closed eyes, picturing to myself the curious altar stone, the great hall with its lofty dome, the quivering beams of light, which leaped and vanished in fantastic play with the dull gloom it mocked, until at last I desired to see it again, and unclosed my eyes.

‘ They fell upon the form of a young girl, who, sitting on the edge of my crib, was gently fanning me with a large leaf. She was unmistakably of Jewish birth; little as I had studied my fellow-creatures, the large soft luminous eyes, the full red lips, and the

light olive-tinted face were sufficient to enable me to guess her nationality, even had it not been made more pronounced by the dress she wore, which was like those worn by the women one sees in the Bible pictures.

'As she sat there dreamily fanning me I became conscious of a strange feeling that I had seen her before, and vaguely sought to identify her; but my memory was at fault, and as I tried to catch the phantom memory it seemed ever to escape me, and being tired, I tried not to think of it; but when I would put the thought away it seemed to come back, and every now and then I thought I had it, but it slipped away again, and I grew querulous.

'Suddenly, when I had made up my mind for the twentieth time to put the thought away from me it all came clear, and I remembered the picture in the old clergyman's house at home. I had seen it there when I had taken game from the Squire in the shooting season.

'I stared at her in bewildered surprise for a moment, and then muttered—

"Why, *it's Esther!*"

'With that she smiled, and leaning over me said in a curious tone, pointing towards herself—

"Yarrah, Esther."

Her voice was full and deep, and she spoke slowly and distinctly, but her speech seemed strangely sonorous for a woman.

“ Where am I ? ” I asked in English.

“ Nabene,” she answered, putting her fingers to her ears and swaying her head sideways, as the Kafir races do when they do not understand.

‘ Again I asked—in Kafir, then in the Boer lingo, then in Portuguese (of which I had picked up a little at Lorenzo Marquez)—but at each attempt she slowly swayed her head and answered only—

“ Nabene.”

‘ Giving that up, I asked—pointing to her,—

“ What are you ? Jew ?—Africander ?—Hollander ? English ?—Spaniard ?—Italian ?”—hoping she might recognise one of the words and give me a clew.

‘ But though she listened attentively she was plainly ignorant of my meaning, and only answered with the slow movement of her head and the one word “ Nabene.”

‘ Then by signs I tried to ask her where my companions were; but though she followed my movements with the gravest attention, she did not seem to comprehend me. At last I held up my hands and pointed to one finger, then to myself.

“ Adam !—lapo (here).”

‘ Then touching the next two fingers, I pointed to her.

“ Intombi—Mooi maisgie ! ” (girls), and spread out my hands—which is with some tribes a sign of ignorance.

‘ Then at the next finger I said—

“ Umlungu ”—(white man).

'And at each of the next four—"Kafirs," spreading out my hands after each question.

'She repeated my words after me like a parrot and I grew angry at her stupidity. At the next however she seemed to grasp my meaning, for when I said, "Hottentot," and held my hand about four feet from the floor she became more interested, and when I added "Dick" she smiled and was evidently pleased with herself, for she said with a curiously naïve tone of interrogation—

"Deeck?"

"Yah, yebo, yes," I answered. "*Dick, yarra*h," for I guessed *yarra*h meant *yes* in her language.

"Heu. Deeck!" she said again, and then she held up her own hands and pointing to me whispered shyly—

"Adāam?"

"Yarra

h," I said, smiling.

Then on four fingers she said "Hamie," by which I gathered she meant the Kafirs, and nodded assent.

'Then she turned down two of the four fingers which had represented the Kafirs, and, leaning back against the wall, closed her eyes and simulated sleep or death.

'I began to understand her better now, and presently gathered that of Captain Clayton and his daughters' fate she was ignorant.

'She had left Dick last, and she smiled when she pointed with one finger of her right hand to the *little finger* of the left, as if there were some joke about the Hottentot.

“Heu! Deeck! yarra, mamie Deeck!” she exclaimed, with a low musical laugh.

‘Still, with the smile lurking about her lips, she presently rose up and walked towards the other side of the quadrangle. I lay in my crib and watched her, marvelling at the stateliness of her gait, and the curious contradiction of her almost childish manner with her serene and solemn face.

‘She stopped, and bent over a crib hollowed like mine in the rocky wall, and a moment later a pair of dusky legs dangled undecidedly over the ledge as if the owner was not sure whether he would turn out or not.

‘But the girl Esther rapidly decided the matter, for with a sweep of one of her splendid arms she pinioned the sluggard, and seemingly without effort lifted him clear from his nest and deposited him on the floor.

‘It was Dick!

‘I called to him with all my strength and he heard me, but I did not see him when he reached my berth, for the effort gave me such pain that I suppose I fainted, for when next I opened my eyes, the girl Esther was bathing my forehead, and Dick was sitting perched at my head gazing anxiously down at me.

‘I was content to see him there and know that I could speak to him presently, but for the moment I lay still and felt the comfort of the cooling bandages and the sweet-smelling scent.

‘The face of the girl as she bent over me was grave and beautiful with an almost severe beauty, but when

presently I gave a sigh of relief and smiled at her, she smiled back merrily, and pointing to the little Hottentot, said satirically—

“ Chalta ! Mamie Deeck ! ”

‘ Dick scowled at her, and began jabbering to me so fast that I could scarcely understand him, and had to make him speak slower, and recount all that had happened in proper sequence from the time of the attack by the big sentinels. Dick was a born orator, and once understanding that I desired him to speak slow he stood before me on the ground with just his monkey-like face, and his shoulders visible above the edge of the cot.

‘ Then he reminded me of the attack by the Kafir on the Captain, and standing farther away he partly recounted and partly acted the scenes which followed.

‘ I gathered from him that at the sound of the rifle-shot Mafuti urged them to fly with the girls, but they would not go, and Umseeahn, Methlembomvu, and Mahali sprang back into the cave to rescue us.

‘ As the great sentinel struck me down Captain Clapton fired but missed, and Umseeahn threw himself on the guard, and disregarding his murderous axe, closed with him so furiously that he overbalanced him, and they rolled together on the ground.

‘ Almost at the same time, at the far end of the first cavern where the dead men were pinioned the two girls who were awaiting the issue of the fight in that icy charnel-house, saw a portion of the rock slip back,

and from the opening came a band of men armed with spears and battle-axes.

‘ These men burst in upon the second cave just as Umseeahn had thrown himself on the sentinel, and as they came crowding in, Captain Clayton fired twice with fatal effect into their ranks.

‘ Then for the space of several minutes Captain Clayton, Mahali, Methlembomvu, Dick, and Mafuti waged an unequal strife, but were overpowered by numbers, and as Dick quaintly put it, “ after much hell they were tied up,” meaning after much fighting they were beaten and taken prisoners, that is, the Captain, Mahali, and Dick, but Methlembomvu and Mafuti were dead ; and on the ground still locked in each other’s arms lay Umseeahn and the great sentinel.

‘ It made my blood tingle to hear Dick recount the magnificent bravery of Umseeahn ! When the band, who had flown to the guard’s assistance, had made us secure, they turned their attention to the two still struggling enemies and tried to separate them, but Umseeahn would not let go. They were astonished, for even when they pricked him with their spears he would not loose his hold, but grappled the more fiercely with his foe. At last one of the guards thrust a spear deep into his body, and his clasp relaxed and he lay as one dead.

‘ Dick and Captain Clayton were taken away bound to the hall where I was now lying, and presently myself and Mahali, who was also badly wounded, were

brought in. Then the two girls passed through guarded by the men who had taken us, and last of all Umseeahn's body was brought in. He was still breathing, and in fact was even now alive, but delirious.

'The men were, according to Dick, Portuguese—like the girl Esther—but I knew he was wrong, and he admitted that when he had tried to converse with them they had not appeared to understand him.

'I learned from Dick, who had now given over his acting and was sitting quietly on the edge of the crib, that a few hours after we had been brought hence, the Captain and the two girls had been taken away, and himself freed from his bonds, but his freedom was useless, for the great hall had no visible egress, and he had not noticed particularly the spot at which he entered. He had no doubt, however, that there were several doors, which were opened and closed by levers or springs.

'Further, I learned that in the daytime the woman Esther and several others came in, and while some of them nursed Mahali, Umseeahn, and myself, the others employed themselves in sweeping and clearing the hall. But at night-time the women went away, and the place was guarded by two of their countrymen at each of the four sides.

'And further, he told me that on the eastern side of the great white altar there sat day and night two young lads clothed in white tunics, and they did

nothing but watch the summit of the altar ; occasionally feeding the fire, which smouldered there, with some curious fuel, and while one watched the other slept.

‘And none of the people spoke to these youths, but passed by them reverently, and Dick confided to me that in his opinion they were young medicine-men. But the strangest thing in all Dick’s strange narrative was yet to come, for in an awe-struck voice he whispered to me that every day when the sun’s rays shone full on the summit of the altar there came a band of wise men or priests, whom he had heard Esther call “Umklanass,” and he believed they worshipped and made offering at the great white stone ; but of this he could not be certain, for the berths were all closed up on their entry and not opened till they retired. Even as Dick told me this in a hushed whisper, there fell on our ears the distant sound of music, and Dick bounded across the quadrangle and disappeared into his nook.

CHAPTER VI

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

‘FROM the farther end—that is, the end facing me as I lay in my crib—there came a band of swarthy Jewish-looking men, dressed in white robes hanging from the neck downwards as far as the knees—(long after this I learned from Captain Clayton that the stuff of which the robes were made was “byssus,” but I do not know what byssus is, only it was a thick white cloth without seams)—the robe was fastened round each man’s waist by a broad girdle of two or three colours, and the ends of the girdle were knotted and hung down in front.

‘The men wore turbans of the stuff “byssus,” and in their right hands they carried staves.

‘Their legs were bare, but on their feet they wore sandals which deadened their footsteps, so that they seemed to move over the stone floor noiselessly.

‘The faint sounds of the music died away as they entered, and as it ceased I rose up to see from whence it came, but I was too weak to do more than just raise myself. Then I fell back, but not before I had caught

a glimpse of moving rock which seemed slowly to glide across the opening of a high vaulted passage.

‘ I was not strong, and I leaned back expecting the girl Esther would refresh me with the scent again as she had done before ; but she did not, and when I looked for her she was gone, the band of priests stood immovable in the centre of the hall before the dais or altar, each man gazing straight in front of him.

‘ A moving gleam of white on the far side attracted my attention, and I could see a slightly-built stripling moving quickly around, halting here and there as though performing some task. Presently he moved to a part of the hall where I could not see him, and I lay watching the strange priests as they stood motionless before the altar.

‘ Soon I heard a slow grating noise close to my head, and immediately afterwards the youth appeared at my side. He had a strangely pure and beautiful face but very wistful and solemn for one of his tender age ; and his eyes seemed to burn with a supernatural brilliancy.

‘ He pushed the kaross upon which I was lying well away from the ledge and then with a warning gesture stepped backwards a pace. As he did so the grating noise commenced again, and slowly a thick slab of rock emerged from the end of my crib and gradually moved towards the head until it had completely shut me in.

‘ It was quite dark—the slab ran in a groove and ended in one, so that no chink of light came in. For

a moment I thought I was to be buried alive, but as I reflected on the kindness of the woman Esther, and on what Dick had told me, I recovered my equanimity, for surely they would not have taken the trouble to nurse me back to life and then let me die !

'Perhaps, I reasoned, it was that the rites of these strange people prohibited the presence of strangers, and then I knew I was right, for Dick had said the "camps," as he called the berths, were all closed up during the visit of the Umklanass. I had not understood his meaning at the time, but now it was clear to me, and I lay back without further troubling myself.

'It seemed a long time to me before the grating noise became audible again, I suppose it was not more than half-an-hour, but it appeared much longer to me that first time, afterwards when I grew used to it the time seemed as nothing—but I was new to captivity then.

'When the slab rolled back the priests were just filing into the passage, and ere the slab had quite disappeared at my feet I saw the mouth of the passage slowly being obscured. A moment later there was nothing to mark the entrance to their retreat.

'The girl Esther again came to my side, and presently Dick, and as he and I spoke together the girl busied herself about my wounded chest, occasionally pausing and looking towards us as though wondering what we were saying.

‘ I talked long with Dick and sent him to look at Umseeahn and Mahali. Umseeahn was still delirious, but Mahali was conscious, his experiences had been similar to ours, and he was being carefully tended.

‘ I desired Dick to try and establish some communication with the girl Esther, but without avail, for she disregarded him, and with a muttered “ Mamie Deeck ! ” turned from him. I was determined to try and understand her, and as Dick with a sullen scowl at the girl gave up the attempt, I tried my hand.

“ Esther,” I said, pointing to her.

“ Yarrah ! ” came her reply with her amused smile.

“ Dick,” I continued, pointing to the Hottentot.

“ Yarrah,” she assented—adding scornfully “ Mamie Deeck.”

“ Adam,” I said, pointing to myself.

“ Yarrah, Adāam,” she answered.

“ *Mamie Adam ?* ”

“ *Nabene ! Nabene !* ” she retorted.

“ Mamie Esther ? ” I ventured.

‘ With that she drew herself up proudly and regarded me steadily.

“ Nabene, Adāam, nabene,” she said, as though I had hurt her.

“ Dick,” I said, speaking to the Hottentot, “ ‘ Yarrah ’ means *yes*, and ‘ Nabene ’ means *no*, in their language—what does *mamie* mean, I wonder ? ”

‘ She followed our actions and seemed to carefully

listen to our words, as I said "*mamie*" she pointed to the Hottentot and exclaimed—

' "Chalta ! Mamie—Deeck."

' Then I remembered the word "Hamie," and, holding up two of my fingers, looked at her interrogatively, and said "Hamie ? "

' "Y'ni chalta, y'ni chalta," she answered, pointing first in the direction in which Umseeahn lay and then to that in which Dick had told me they had placed Mahali.

' "'Y'ni' means *one*, and ' chalta ' means *there*," I said to Dick, proud of my success.

' And then I pointed to my eyes, mouth, nose, ears, and hands, while she gave me their meanings in her tongue, so that soon I had many words at command ; but I could not learn any verbs or adjectives, only simple descriptive words which I soon found were but of little use.

' But still I felt hopeful, and when later on she fed me with some broth in an earthen vessel I learned the names of these too—you will find them all in my old pocket-book, for in the days that came after this I amused myself with writing them down—but they never did me any good.

' This first day was an eventful one to me, but those that followed were but a repetition. I seemed slow to get well, and neither Mahali nor Umseeahn were able to move. Dick came and went between Mahali and me, and tried to learn from him if he had any clew to the

identity of our captors, but he could tell us nothing; and Umseeahn lay all day long rigid and speechless, glaring vacantly up into the dark recesses of his rocky apartment, seeming to heed nothing that passed.

‘The girl Esther waited on me assiduously, and, as I have said, I learned many words of her language, but none that were of any use to me.

‘Daily the Umklan as entered the hall, heralded by the faint sound of music, but I never saw the musicians, and as soon as the Umklan as arrived at a certain spot, one or other of the young lads came round and sealed us in our rocky bed-chambers. There was one thing we learned through Mahali, and that was, that the women all left the Hall before the priestly rites began. He knew this because, being at the far end, he was the last to be shut in, and always noticed that the women passed into a corridor or passage facing that through which the priests entered.

‘As I grew stronger the monotony of the place chafed me. My progress in learning the language seemed to lead to nothing, and as my strength came back I fretted at being a prisoner and ill, for I had never been a mollycoddle.

‘The girl Esther was good to me—I will say that for her—though I would kill her if she stood by me now. Yes! *I would kill her! for what she did afterwards.* Yet at that time she was very good and patient with me, never seeming to mind my harsh words and gestures when she misunderstood me, but tending me all

the time in her slow stately way with an almost motherly devotion. And though when she was in a merry mood it irritated me to see how infantile she was, yet, when she grew to understand my ways she repressed her innocent mirth with a pitifully transparent effort.

'But one day there came an end to this state of things. I was sitting up in my crib, when Dick came running across to say that Umseeahn was moving, he did not seem in any other way changed, either for better or worse, and still stared vacantly into the dusky recesses of his chamber. But the long lethargy had ceased, and every now and then a great shiver ran through his body, and his limbs moved spasmodically.

'When Dick told me this, I made as though I would get up and see my brave fellow again, but as my feet touched the floor, the deep voice of Esther my nurse sounded in my ears.

"Nabene!—Adāam,—Nabene!"

"Yarrah!" I cried angrily, and pushed her on one side, but at the same instant, the distant music that heralded the advent of the Umklanās made itself heard, and presently they came in.

'Dick was already scudding across to his recess, and Esther, with one warning gesture, passed before me on her way out; but, as she did so, she gave a slight start and hesitated, looking anxiously towards the Umklanās.

'They took no heed of her, but stood immovable—the girl seemed bewildered, and I tried to see what had

alarmed her, but whatever it was her body intercepted it.

'The young lad was drawing near to close in the recesses on my side, and, turning towards him, Esther aspirated the peculiar ejaculation so common to her—

"Heu!"

'He looked towards her gravely inquiring and reproachful, as though she had no business there.

'But at the same time his eyes dilated and he sprang forward, drawing a peculiar knife from the folds of his tunic.

'And then I saw what had disturbed them.

'Standing close by, as if to gain a momentary rest and nerve himself for further effort, was the Zulu Umseeahn.

'Oh, Umseeahn!—brave lion-heart! I can see him now, the intrepid Zulu, as he stood in that accursed hall that day.

'His eyes were bloodshot and wild, and he seemed under the influence of delirium; there was a froth half-white, half-bloody on his lips, and when he moved again I could see the dreadful ravages his illness had made; his great ribs stood out against his emaciated body, his arms and legs were shrivelled and shrunken, and one arm hung limp and useless at his side. A great wound, extending from his cheek-bone to his chin, showed its red gaping edges, and formed a ghastly setting to his stern and terrible face.

'As he drew near the youth sprang forward to inter-

cept him, but, with a strength that seemed miraculous in one so fearfully wounded, Umseeahn seized him by the wrist, and wrenching the knife from him, plunged it heavily into the poor lad's breast.

'I saw the red blood spurt over the snowy byssus, and heard a shrill cry from the girl Esther; simultaneous with her cry, the other lad (or acolyte, I think was what Captain Clayton called him), came from behind the altar, and held up his hand warningly; his eyes lit upon the falling form of his comrade, and with a gesture of horror he threw up his arms.

'Umseeahn, with the mad glare in his eyes, moved heavily and painfully towards him, carrying in his right hand the bloody knife.

'I climbed from my crib and tried to stagger forward, but before I could reach him, the Umklanas had awakened to what was going on, and had surrounded him. I saw one of them raise his stave to strike, and I shouted to him to stay his hand for the man was mad, but even as my shout sounded through the air, the blow descended, and without a word the Zulu fell backward on the stone floor with a sickening crash. The blood-shot eyes grew dimmed and glazed in death, and the bloody froth ceased to bubble from the open lips, and lay upon them thick and horrible.

'I saw some of the Umklanas raise the dying lad and bear him tenderly towards his comrade, and then obeying the gestures of the man nearest me, I retired to my crib and waited to be shut in.

'It was the younger lad who had been killed, and when his companion came round, I saw that he was dreadfully agitated, his bosom heaved, and his dark eyes were full of tears; he looked at me reproachfully but not angrily, and shut me in.

'This was the first break in the monotony of my imprisonment, but other events succeeded rapidly. Three days after the lad's death I found a loose slab of rock about five inches long and an inch wide, and with this I determined to check the closing of my crib so that I might see what the Umklanans did.

'When Esther left me, and after the lad had started the door, I slipped my piece of rock into the corner nearest my head, and to my delight found that it was sufficient to stop the closing of the slab, but the boy must have either watched the door or discovered me when I slipped the rock in, for a moment later the stone door rolled backwards, and with an indignant look the acolyte snatched up the impediment and the door closed on me.

'I was chagrined at my failure, and ruminated on some other method of circumventing them and seeing what was going on. I had no right to do it, perhaps, but I meant to, and planned many schemes; but as the time passed on I began to grow uneasy, for my door did not roll back, and hour after hour passed by until I came to notice with despair that the air was more difficult to breathe, and guessed that for my curiosity I was to be entombed alive.

'But this was not to be my fate, for when I was about to give up all hope the stone rolled back, and with a sigh of relief I looked out, expecting to see patient Esther standing by—but it was not Esther I saw.

CHAPTER VII

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

‘AN Umklana or Priest stood heavily regarding me, and behind him were four of the great Kafirs. At a motion from him they presently lifted me out, and bore me in the direction of the hidden door through which the priests passed after their ceremonies.

‘The Umklana walked in front, and when we reached the farther side a stone moved slowly back and discovered a long narrow corridor in which were several of the great Kafirs. As the Umklana passed them they raised their hands in salutations and uttered a guttural expression, “Hough !”

‘At the end of the corridor there appeared to be no egress, but presently the rock moved and we entered another hall, lighter, and smaller than the one we had left, but untenanted.

‘We passed through other chambers until at last we came to one in which there were two people sitting side by side—a man and a woman.

‘The man had a face so weirdly beautiful, and yet so repellent, that I gazed on him fascinated: his eyes were large and dark and melancholy, his hair curling about

his shapely head in short wavy rings, his mouth clear-cut and beautiful, yet significant of latent cruelty. His dress like and yet unlike those of the Umklanas, for over the white robe he wore an upper garment of dark blue byssus without sleeves, the skirt lined with tassels of red, and between each tassel was a little golden bell which tinkled as the garment rustled in the slight draught. Again over this garment he wore an ephod worked in blue, gold, red, and white.

'On each shoulder was an onyx set in gold, and like the Umklanas his feet were cased in sandals.

'I seemed to take in his dress at the first glance; after that, my eyes appeared to be bound to his by some powerful influence. As I looked, the large dark eyes seemed to lose something of their melancholy introspectiveness and to dilate and burn into mine as though seeking to read my inmost thoughts. The woman by his side was almost his exact counterpart in face and expression, but there was a crueller look in her beautiful fathomless eyes, the long lissom hands outstretched in her lap seemed with the twining restless fingers ready to tear and rend, and on her proud cold lips there lurked a cruel smile. I could feel her fathomless eyes looking at me even as I stood gazing at her companion, and I felt rather than saw a disdainful look flit over her dark face as I stood speechless before them.

'They were both young, and the woman was clad in a robe of purple, tied at the waist with a belt of

twisted byssus. I do not know how long I stood, spellbound, gazing into the dark melancholy eyes of the young priest, but presently I grew faint and tottered, and the Umklana at my side supported me with his arm.

‘ I felt my brain reel, and seemed to see the eyes of the young priest growing larger and larger; just as I felt that I must faint, I heard a murmur of voices, and then the clear sweet voice of Isabel Clayton sounded distinctly in my ears—

“ It is *Adam*, Father! *Adam Varney* !”

‘ I turned to them and saw them coming towards me, the Captain and the two girls.

‘ Katie ran forward and took my hand. “ You poor old Adam,” she said, “ what *have* they been doing to you ?”

‘ The pretty child! her pleasant tones were like music in my ears, and though I could not for the moment answer her, I pressed her hand, and the Captain’s, and last of all Isabel’s. In the joy of meeting them again, I almost forgot our captivity, and the strange people who were our captors: but even as they pressed their urgent questions on me, there came ringing across the hall the clear clarion voice of the young priest—

“ Shēmi !”

‘ We turned at the ringing tones, and the Captain advanced towards the dais upon which the man and woman sat. By signs the man appeared to ask him

what relation he was to me, and the Captain answered in the same way. Under cover of this I turned to Isabel: "Who is that man?" I asked in a low tone.

'Almost under her breath, as if she feared even his name, she answered—

"ISBAN-ISRAEL—the *King*!"

"King of what—who are these people?"

"I cannot tell you here—by-and-bye," she whispered: "they are Jews!"

'She seemed afraid to speak; but saucy Kate had heard my question, and drew closer to me.

"*He* is the King—and *that wretch* is the Queen, IRA. She is like a great brown snake—look at her, Adam! she is watching you."

'I looked up, and met the sombre eyes which were turned in my direction, yet seemed not to see me, but to be looking beyond me into space.

"She is like a witch," muttered Katie, rebelliously, "she hates Isabel and me, and she tries to frighten us with her great eyes. I believe she would kill us if it were not for Isban-Israel."

'As she finished, the Captain returned to us, and taking my arm led me away with him through other chambers, the girls following, and presently we were alone in a rocky cavern, which had no outlet, save the one by which we had entered, and here we sat down, and I recounted what had passed in the great hall.

'The girls listened wonderingly, but even their interest paled before the avidity with which Captain

Clayton hung upon my words, questioning me closely as to all that had happened, yet seemingly more intent upon the ways and manners of our captors than upon the doings of our captive companions.

‘ While the girls urged me to tell them of Dick, Mahali, and Umseeahn, the Captain kept harking back to the words I had learned, and the appearance and manners of the girl Esther: and during the time we were talking, I had leisure to observe him more closely, and noticed a subtle change in him which pained me. It was not that he was less affectionate to the girls or less good-natured to me, but always he seemed to be absorbed in some thoughts of which he did not speak, and which seemed to remove him from us, even though he sat close by. I had only a faint glimmering of this change at first, but as the days passed away, and he had no hope of obtaining further information concerning these strange people from me, he spoke less and less to us, and sat enwrapped in thought, with his note-book open before him; sometimes, indeed, he carefully copied the curious ciphers or hieroglyphics with which the rocky walls were marked, but more often he sat quite still and motionless, as if hunting some fugitive thought, and in those moods I sometimes fancied his face wore a faint reflection of the brooding mysticism which marked the countenances of Isban-Israel and Ira his sister.

‘ But though the change in the Captain grieved me, I had no cause to complain of my own lot: we were

prisoners, it is true, and could not wander beyond the precincts of the four caves which had been assigned us, for if they had any other outlet than the one leading to the King's chamber, it was securely hidden, and the corridor leading from the chamber of Isban-Israel was guarded night and day by the Kafir sentries.

'But soon I grew to almost love our confinement, for my wound was nearly healed and my strength was coming back with every day that passed: all the long days Isabel and Katie and I sat in the sunniest nooks and talked, and in the nights lying warm and comfortable under the soft skins, I dreamed of Isabel.

'For I had learned to love her dearly—she was a lady born, and I but a rough Somerset clod, but I loved her!—Oh, my darling! my darling! I loved her as well and purely as any of the fine gentlemen could have loved her—and sometimes when her eyes met mine suddenly, I saw something in them that made my blood leap and bound and tingle,—a look that half confessed she loved me too.

'If I were one of those artist fellows, I would draw a picture for you—the warm bright cavern, from the roof of which the sun-rays shimmered in, in long flickering bars of light, with little dusty particles twirling round and round until they disappeared with tremulous flashes into the crevices above: and right where most of these sunbeams centred, lying or sitting on a great roll of skins, the two fair English girls, listening, with wide-opened eyes, to my clumsy

stories. You would not think I could tell stories—a rough chap like me—but they used to love to hear them, and many a bright afternoon we passed like that. Katie loved best to hear of my fights and hunting exploits, of the rough life at the diggings, and of my poaching days, for it matters little now that I own to having had many a wild night with the poachers—I remember how Katie used to revel in these stories and speculate on what my father would have done if he had caught me in the preserves.

'But Isabel liked best to hear of young Haydon's death; and when I would tell her how I tramped down past the Komati sick and faint with the heat and fever, and bore the poor lad to the Portuguese settlement, she would bend forward with tears in her big grey eyes, and make me tell the pitiful details over and over again; and, though I do not think I bragged of what I did, I could see she thought a lot of it, and even when I told her of the headstone the Irishman and I put up for the dead man she did not smile—as I've heard many did who saw it—but she was always gentle, and so thoughtful and tender. Sometimes the girls would tell me stories of their lives, but it was Katie who did most of the talking. Not all the captivity in the world could shake Katie Clayton's high spirits, and many a girlish prank she recounted in those days. And the wild girl would sometimes mimic the Queen Ira for our benefit, and setting her saucy face into a comical caricature of Ira, she would turn

her head slowly from side to side, and pierce us with a stony stare; but I was always glad when she had finished, for there was something so uncanny about these people that I feared them, and it was always in my mind that from some loophole or vantage ground the dark eyes of the Queen were watching the impudent child.

'I have said that Katie did most of the talking; but in the gloaming sometimes Isabel would tell us tales beside which mine seemed stupid and common. I did not know any poetry at all, nor much of the mythical history of England; but sometimes Isabel would recite in her low, sweet voice the story of Arthur, the blameless king, and of Guinevere, his queen; and she knew so much by heart, that sometimes she would get quite excited as she told the tale, and when she failed to remember the words, she would tell the rough outlines of the story until she came to another bit she remembered, and then begin again. And she told the story of Vivien and Merlin, Geraint and Enid, Elaine, and the saddest one of all, Guinevere; and when I did not quite understand she would explain the curious-sounding words to me. And once she was telling us of Lancelot, and Katie burst out—

"Oh, Adam, what a lovely Lancelot you'd be!"

'I remember how proud I was and yet how humbled when her sister answered, "No; I do not think Adam is like Lancelot du Lake, Katie."

'I did not know then that she meant that I would

not have been disloyal to my king; but Katie told me a day or two afterwards, and I was so glad and proud, and used to wish those days of chivalry might come again, and I might wear my love's token in my helm and be her true knight always for evermore. And then I would grow sick and angry for my foolish thoughts, for how could a Somersetshire gamekeeper's son be a knight? Well enough I knew that I was not a gentleman; but, all the same, I used to give rein to my wild fancies, and lying in the dark cave at night watching the faint glimmer of the sky through the crevices of the roof, I would imagine myself one of the noble knights of the Round Table imprisoned by the heathen, while Isabel, my ladye love, wept for me at home.

'You would not think I was such a fool—such a dreaming fool as that—would you? Ah me! it was foolish, but so pleasant. Little by little those girls softened my rough manners, and taught me many things, but always so gently and delicately that they never wounded me, but made me at ease with them.

'Sometimes Katie would tell me of their capture by the Kafir sentries; but there was not very much to tell, for the rush of the huge blacks had been so impetuous that the girls were captured and in their prison before they had well realised what had happened; and once in their cavern, they had seen no one but the Kafir sentinels, and had kept quiet, confidently expecting to be rescued by their father before long.

As the imprisonment lengthened they grew anxious; but both girls seemed to have been quite sure their father would come to them sooner or later, and meantime they were not molested.

'The Captain rarely spoke to us now, and grew more and more engrossed in his studies. I knew from the girls that he considered he had a clew to a great secret; but I did not try to discover it, for it was Maytime with me at first, but after a while I grew anxious to know my fate. And at last one day, when Katie had fallen asleep and her father stood staring intently at a rough plan he had drawn on the wall, I began telling Isabel a story I had heard of a Kimberley miner—rough, but real true grit—who had made a big pile, and gone home and married an English lady.

'I had often meant to tell her the story, but somehow I had always let the chance slip away, but this time I told it.

'She listened quietly enough, but when I finished and said in my rough way, "I don't suppose she could possibly have loved him, though," she answered quietly—

"But why, Adam?"

"He was not a gentleman—why! he was a rough fellow like *me*," I cried.

'She smiled at that. "But, Adam, you are not so rough as you think, and, indeed, I know many so-called gentlemen both at home and in the colony who are not half as chivalrous as you—and I know very few who are so brave and good," she added softly.

‘ There was the light in her eyes again. Lovelight it was, I was sure now, and bending over her, I said—

“ Could you do as that lady did, Isabel ? and marry a common man like that ? ”

‘ Her cheeks grew flushed, and I could see her tremble, but her brave grey eyes looked straight into mine.

“ Perhaps,” she said, “ if I loved him.”

‘ I knew she loved me then, and though I asked her would she be my wife, I did not need her answer: it came clear and fearless from her honest eyes, and yet I would not have missed her “ Yes, Adam, I love you dearly,” for all the world.

‘ We were standing up then, and I took my darling in my arms and kissed her for the first time in my life, and as my lips met hers a curious shudder ran through me, and looking up I met the inscrutable eyes of Ira the Queen fixed upon us. Isabel turned at the same time and saw the Queen, and she shivered in my arms.

“ Oh, Adam ! ” she cried, “ that woman is my enemy and yours, I am sure of it.”

‘ I drew her to my side, and her distress enraged me with the cause of it, so that as I drew Isabel the closer to me I glared angrily at the Queen.

‘ She stood regarding us steadfastly for a moment or two, then with a cruel smile she turned away and left us.

CHAPTER VIII

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

'I TOLD Captain Clayton that night that Isabel and I loved each other, but at first he scarcely seemed to understand me; when he did, he grew furiously angry and forbade my mentioning the subject again.

'It was, I suppose, with the object of preventing as much as possible any further conversation between us next day that he called us all into the larger cave directly after our morning meal, and stating briefly that he meant to tell us who our captors were, launched out into a long story, which lasted all day. I do not remember much of it, but he spoke of the ten tribes carried away by Shalmanezzer, successor of Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, more than 700 years before Christ, and I remember that he said Nahum the Prophet lived in those days, and he was angry with Katie because she asked if he was the Prophet who was eaten up by bears.

'Also, he told us of many other kings who were at that time reigning—Hosea as king of Israel, Mardocempalus, king of Babylon, Hezekiah, king of Judah, and Perdiccas, king of Macedon.

‘I grew sick of it and tried to catch Isabel’s eyes, but she shook her head, and by signs urged me to humour her father, and so, with but an ill grace, I did so.

‘The captain told us how Hosea was under tribute to Shalmanezzer, and formed an alliance with So, king of Egypt, whose son was Serechus, or Seve, or, as some called him, Amysis the Blind.

‘And he told us how Hosea, strong in his alliance with So, rebelled against paying tribute, and when the Assyrian officer came from Shalmanezzer to demand it, Hosea put him in prison, and Shalmanezzer laid siege to Samaria, and took and destroyed it after three years: and how So rounded on Hosea, and did not help him as he had promised, but left him in the lurch.

‘And how Shalmanezzer had carried off the ten tribes to Halah and Gozan, cities of Media, where the people worshipped Ormuzd.

‘And the Captain showed us on the wall a rough plan or map with strange figures and letters on it, and told us of places I had never heard of—Memphis, Tanis, On, Ælana, Berenice, Chemnis, and Thebes, and how great they were. But I could not follow him, for I knew he was trying to keep Isabel from me, and she listened to him until I grew sulky and did not pretend to listen: but the Captain soon forgot all about Isabel and I, for presently, when the passion in his voice roused me to listen, I found him with blazing

eyes telling of the jealousy of the tribes of Judah and Israel, and how they were the lost tribes of which I remembered vaguely to have heard in my boyhood.

'At noon when we had dined he began again, and told us how from the hieroglyphics and plans upon the wall, he had discovered that a section of the lost tribes of Judah and Israel had secretly stolen away from the land of their captivity carrying with them the grandson of their former king, and after a long and perilous journey had found themselves at the seaside, and how seizing by stratagem two large boats which lay at anchor near the shore they had put off to sea, and knowing nothing of seamanship, had drifted hither and thither at the mercy of the gales, until at last a storm arose and drove them far away, and eventually cast them upon a desolate shore—and how the king and the seven priests had led the way across the rough desert country, till at last they settled in a fertile land and worshipped in their old way, without let or hindrance.

'And as the years rolled on the band increased and multiplied, and they grew so numerous that they wrested from the savage tribes around, flocks and herds, and they laid the country under tribute. And their king was Sysis, the finder—because he found the new land. And Sysis died and Isban-Syros, his son, became king, and still the tribe grew stronger with every year; but when Isban-Syros lay dying, his sons Ses and Paros claimed the kingship and quarrelled before the dying king, and Paros slew

Ses before his father's eyes, and the old king cursed him that he had killed his brother, and Isban-Syros called aloud to the priests and the elders, that for the blood of Ses the tribe should be broken and decimated, and should live like foxes in holes for evermore, until the sin of Paros should be atoned.

'And Ses left no children, but Paros had one son, Paros-Rael, a pious and gentle youth, dedicated to the priesthood, and when he heard the words of Isban-Syros he cried out that he should tell how the sin might be known to be atoned, and Isban-Syros whispered the secret in his ear.

'Then Paros Rael left the tribe with seventy of his kinsmen and women and abode in the caves by the great water, and Paros reigned in the place of Isban-Syros. But before many days Paros sickened and died, and a mortal sickness smote many of the tribe, and those that were left were weak and helpless; then the heathen who dwelt about—the "Hamie"—came down and smote them as they lay ill, and they spared neither women nor children, but destroyed them all, so that the curse of Isban-Syros came true, and of all the tribe only Paros Rael and his kinsfolk were left alive—and they lay hidden in the caves.

'And the "Hamie," unknowing that some had escaped, settled down on the pasture lands where Isban-Syros and his father had flourished; and in the side of the mountain by the great waters, Paros Rael and his

followers began to dig further and further that they might not be discovered. But when Paros Rael had fled, he had taken with him the precious stones and sacred vestments and symbols of his tribe, that they might not fall into the hands of the heathen.

'Many years passed, and the cave-king died, and left the secret of the atonement to his son Hamysis, and Hamysis was a clever king, and under him the remnant of the tribe made many caves, and burrowed even under the great waters; and in the deep valley on the hither side, the cave-men fed their flocks by night that the "Hamie" might not seize them.

'And when Hamysis died there came many other kings, and ere each one died, he whispered to his successor the secret of the atonement, but no one, not even the priests, knew what it might be.

'The Captain told us all this, and more, and then, with his hands quite shaking with excitement, he showed us on the wall a chart of the caves. Those first inhabited by Paros Rael were drawn roughly and without scale, but the others were more carefully done, and we could easily see where we were—for the great hall guided us, and I still carried my little pocket-compass.

'We made out that we were on the opposite side of the mountain to that over which the falls rushed, and this partly accounted for the warmth of the caves, for the sun was on them during nearly the whole of the day, also we could see that we were nearer the mountain

top—"two stories higher" as Katie said—than were the caves in which the girls had been imprisoned.

'In the evening again the Captain went on with the story he had learned from the writing on the walls, and told us how in the time of one Asis the cave-dwellers had one night been startled by the appearance of a huge Kafir or "Hamie," as they called the Kafirs; the man was a fugitive from his tribe, and Asis had given him shelter and made him afterwards bring by stealth his wives and sons to the caves, and from this "Hamie" had sprung the race of great Kafirs who guarded the caves, and the eldest son of this "Hamie" had become a captain of the Kafirs and was appointed to guard the entrances of the caves, and further, the Captain told us how by sleight of hand the cunning priests had worked marvels so that the "Hamie" stood in great awe of them.

'And the fourteen dead men who sat in the great cave below the falls were the captains of the guards who had been placed there when they died, but the other "Hamie" were buried in the earth. Now although I was wroth with the Captain for his treatment of me, I could not help being interested in what he told us, and I believe he forgot all about it for a time, for he bid me good-night quite kindly, but as I said good-night to Isabel she found time to whisper to me not to fret about her father's anger, but to beware of the Queen. If we could but escape, she was sure her father would give way in time.



'This gave me fresh food for thought, and in the days that followed I began to study the charts on the walls and to brood over plans of escape, but for many weeks I could think of no way to freedom, for I could not learn the secret of the springs which opened the doors that led towards the King's quarters, and the charts showed no egress from the caves in which we were imprisoned except the passages leading to the great hall; some of the lower caves were marked on the charts as having openings on to the valley below, but after long thinking I gave up the idea of passing through these caves and putting all other thoughts on one side set myself to learn the secret of the doors.

'Three times every day one of the "Hamie" appeared bearing food and water, but it was useless to think of surprising and overpowering him, for an armed companion stood dimly discernible in the passage beyond, and I knew I should be no match for one of those gigantic Kafirs; for though I was growing stronger every day yet I never quite regained my former strength, and besides, the noise of the conflict would surely bring them assistance.

'So day by day I crouched by the wall at the place where the great smooth rock rolled backwards or forwards, and carefully watched it; but there seemed little chance of detecting the motive power, for there was nothing in the shape of levers or wheels to give me a clew: still I watched on doggedly, and at last took to



sleeping close by the stone door that I might not miss a chance.

‘ One night as I lay half asleep and half awake, the familiar grinding noise sounded in my ears, and I drew back into the shadow of the cave wondering what was to happen.

‘ A faint light glimmered, and made a silvery track across the rough stone floor, and presently Ira, the King’s sister, stepped through the opening, and looking neither to the right nor left, made for the chamber in which the girls slept; it was only separated from the larger cave by a rough curtain of skins, and as Ira disappeared into the place where my darling lay, I crept softly to the curtain and peered in. It was well for me then that I had been a poacher and gamekeeper, for Ira’s quick ears would surely have detected a less practised footfall, for though my feet were bare I was still cautious, for I knew her hearing was phenomenally acute.

‘ She was standing, with a rough lantern, the frame of which was made of silver, and the sides of very thin skin or parchment, in her hand, and gazing down on the two sleeping girls; her great lambent eyes fixed themselves on the unconscious sleepers in an evil glare, and her left hand gripped a long sharp dagger which was but half concealed by her flowing robes. I was about to push back the curtain and spring upon her when a slight sound behind me caused me to turn, and I saw Isban-Israel stepping into the cave through the still open door.

'I drew myself close in to the wall that he might not see me, and through my half-closed eyes watched him as he approached: he wore his usual costume, and carried a little silver lamp similar to that which Ira bore; his face was very stern and white and he walked hurriedly: he too pushed back the curtain, and as he did so, I saw within the tall form of Ira upraised, the lantern in her right hand shining down full on Isabel's upturned face, and in her left the long dagger raised to strike. Isabel was awake, and her eyes were fixed on Ira's face as if fascinated, but she neither moved nor spoke, and by her side lay the still sleeping form of her young sister. In a second Isban-Israel had seized Ira by the wrist and I knew my darling was safe, and crept away full of a sudden inspiration which had fallen upon me: it was to ensconce myself in the corridor to learn the secret of the sliding-door.

'The thought had hardly flashed upon me ere I acted on it, and well it was for me that I did so, for I had only just drawn myself into a slight recess in the rocky walls when Isban-Israel and Ira re-appeared: he still held her wrist in his hand—in the other hand he held the two lanterns and the dagger.

'Ira's face was terrible in its expression, she walked beside her brother with her stately head turned toward his, with such a sea of furious passions chasing themselves over her countenance, that the very sight made me tremble; for furies of love and hate, and baffled rage, followed one another in such rapid succession

that her face was awesome to look upon: one long lithe serpent-hand was clutched to her breast, which rose and fell in wild tumultuous throbs, and the glory of her magnificent hair trailed dishevelled almost to the very ground.

‘As they stepped into the corridor Isban-Israel loosened her wrist, and with a cold glance at her face handed her the lanterns, keeping the dagger in his left hand.

‘Ira held one of the lanterns up, and by its light the king affixed a small piece of iron, something like a bed-key, to a small iron projection in the rock above his head, and as he turned it the door came grating across the opening. Then, without a word, he took the lanterns again, and side by side they moved to the farther end of the corridor and let themselves out by the same means, and I was left in darkness.

‘For a while I sat silently revolving my position, and it seemed to me that unless I could regain my own quarters before the guards came, in the morning, I should probably be killed for attempting to escape: yet I could think of no possible way of returning.

‘I felt along the walls till I met with the projection which was about a quarter of an inch long and cut square, about the size of small dice, but try as I would I could not turn the thing with my fingers, and though I almost wrenched off the flesh in my endeavours, it was of no avail.

‘I sat down and considered again. I had a small

knife and a bull-dog revolver which had been given me by Isabel a few nights previous. She had had them in her keeping ever since our attempt at rescue had failed; for the Captain, not knowing what horrible fate might be in store for the girls, had given these weapons to her, that she and her sister might at least be safe from what would have proved worse than death.

'The muzzle of the revolver was of about the size of the bolt or projection, and with renewed hope I sprang up and attempted to turn back the door, but without avail. Try as I would, the rock remained immovable. I almost wrenched the barrel from the handle in my endeavours, but though the revolver muzzle fitted to the bolt as if made for it, my utmost efforts failed to move it a hair's-breadth.

'After another spell of thought I gave up trying to turn the bolt, for a new idea had come into my head—that perhaps there might be one bolt for opening and another for closing, and in this hope I began carefully groping over the whole surface of the rock—inch after inch I explored with my hands, but until I got almost to the bottom my search was useless. Within an inch or two of the ground, however, and in the opposite direction to the top bolt, I at last found another, and directly I fitted the revolver barrel upon it and gave a twist with my hand the door gave a slight jar, and then rolled slowly back.

'I got into my own cave quickly, and searching for

the upper bolt found, to my delight, that the door rolled forward again, and I had at last the means of *attempting* to escape; but I did not stay thinking long, for my heart was with Isabel, and crossing to the skin-curtained door I whispered and asked if she was all right.

‘ She answered yes, and promised to tell me all in the morning, but I told her I had seen everything, and with a fond good-night I went back to my bed to plot and plan how we should escape.

‘ It seemed at first wonderful that I had not noticed these iron bolts, but they were so small and so exactly the colour of the rocks that perhaps it was not so curious as it seemed, for indeed I had expected to find a handle or rope or some larger method of moving these great blocks.

‘ There was one thing I had noticed—that when the door opened it fell back in a downward direction, and again when it moved forward there was again a downward direction. I noticed this, and pondered over it many a time, but I never learned the secret. But I had now what was better—the means of egress and regress when I chose, and I cared little for hydraulics.

CHAPTER IX

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

'EARLY next morning Isabel came out, and to her I confided my wonderful discovery. Later on, at breakfast, Isabel told the Captain of the visit of Ira, and how Isban-Israel had saved her life: I could see the Captain was troubled at the news, but he said but little, and most of the talking was done by Katie, who upbraided me for not having heard Ira enter; for I held my peace to the others as to the part I had taken. There was something in the Captain's manner which filled me with apprehensions, which were not lessened when, after our meal, he took his elder daughter to another cave, and forbidding Katie and I to follow, left before I could exchange a word with Isabel to warn her against hinting at anything concerning my discoveries.

'But it was not of me the Captain spoke to her; an hour afterwards she came back to us very white and agitated, and told us what her father had said.

'Isban-Israel purposed making Isabel his wife!

'By the customs of the tribe, if a wife of the King bore him no male heirs he could take other wives, so

that the succession should not fall through; and Isban-Israel had seen Isabel and desired her.

‘ She told us the wretched story, with her white face now and then flushing with virginal shame as she recounted how her father had urged her to accept her fate; how he had dwelt on the long descent of this Jewish King; of the priceless wealth he more than half guessed was hidden in the cave-land of this long-lost tribe. She told us too that Ira was the King’s half-sister which accounted for the strange resemblance, and how it was the custom for the Princes of the house to mate with their father’s daughters by another wife, that the strain might be kept pure. All this and more she told us, while Katie with flashing eyes and clenched hands stood listening in a tempest of anger and resentment.

‘ For me I said but little, but I knew that sooner than let that swarthy, cruel man—King though he might be of the oldest race that trod the earth—sooner than he should take my love to be his paramour—for gloss it as he might, the Captain’s explanations could not but have this meaning—sooner than that I would kill Isban-Israel with my own hands. Ay! and his tigress sister-wife as well, even if in doing it I consigned myself to the deadliest hell that mind of man could dream of.

‘ We sat there in horrible expectancy awaiting the Captain’s return, but it was many hours ere he came back, and when he did, his face was quite expression-

less, and his eyes had in them more than ever the dreadful introspective look that made Isban-Israel so awesome to look upon.

'Neither Isabel nor I spoke to him, but Katie with a little passionate cry ran to him, and flinging her arms about him, begged him not to look so; to look at his girls in his own dear old way; to kiss his naughty, flighty Kate; to make Isabel and Adam happy; to escape from these dreadful caves; and to do dozens of other things.

'The words flowed from her pretty mouth in a torrent as she clung about him and patted his bronzed face and fondled his heavy white moustache, but he repulsed her, and when in an agony of grief, she cried that he could not mean to sacrifice her darling Isabel of his own free will, he turned upon her angrily, and untwining her clinging arms, cried hoarsely that he did mean it, that she did not understand, and began to dwell in his mystical way upon the glories of the tribe whose prisoners we were.

'Katie listened to him at first incredulously, then, turning upon him angrily, she upbraided him fiercely, dwelt upon her mother's name in tender accents, and again imperiously facing him, asked how could he meet that mother in the future when he had sold her daughter into bondage that was worse than death!

'Oh Katie! little Katie! sweet, impulsive child, how you strove and strove to turn him from his way, how you upbraided him and caressed him by turns, and how

when the door rolled back in the midst of your pleadings and reproaches, and Ira stepped through the aperture, you faced that queenly serpent-woman, and in a language she could not speak, but whose meaning she could not fail to comprehend, let loose the vials of your girlish wrath !

'Poor little Katie! He never saw her again; for Ira had the guards with her, and after a momentary glare from the pitiless eyes, our poor girl fell back, upset and faint with the violence of her emotion against the wall, and as she did so, the queen held up her hand, and the two guards sprang forward and tore the fainting girl away from us for ever.

'I wrestled futilely with one, but he easily overcame me, and with a malevolent look at Isabel, the Queen followed them, and the door closed on Katie for ever.

'Captain Clayton had not moved during this scene, but sat in a sort of trance gazing heavily before him. Even when the Queen and her satellites had gone, bearing Katie with them, and Isabel's tears fell on his outstretched hands, as she bent over him, he never moved. I grew to hate him in that hour; and though Isabel clung to him still, and tried to win him back, he seemed ever wrapped in his dreams and his interminable researches.

'From the day Katie was taken from us, I set to work—chiefly in the night-time—to find how far I could penetrate with my key; and in the course of a week I penetrated twice to the King's ante-chamber,

and, hidden in its dark recesses, waited and watched. I found that at all hours of the night the King and Queen made visits of inspection to the various caves, she with her face muffled in a great linen wrap, and he with his head covered by an ephod or hood. The third visit I made came near to being my death, for seeing them one night go to a portion of the cave which I had never seen them approach before, I followed them stealthily, and almost came upon them as I turned an angle in the narrow and gloomy passage. It was a treasure-house or temple, and I saw Isban-Israel standing before a curious-looking structure about four feet high, it was made of ebony or some dark wood, and had little minarets on the top; and, as I looked, Isban-Israel pulled a projecting knob, and drew out a long shallow drawer in which were rolls of skin, on which I could detect characters like writing.

'While Ira held the lantern, the King turned to a portion of the skin or parchment, and studied it intently, as if trying to solve some intricate question. As he stood there with the ephod shadowing his darkly beautiful face, his sister-wife regarded him fixedly as though she would guess how his mind was working: presently with a slight shake of his head, he replaced the skin and absently drew out several other drawers, from the depths of which by the lantern light I could see rare jewels gleaming, and in one there was nothing but a great layer of large amethysts. As he closed the drawers I turned to go, lest they

should discover me, and, as I moved, a little fragment of rock was dislodged by my weight : it scarcely made a sound in falling, but Ira raised the lantern high in her hand, and looked towards me, but the light must have dazzled her, for she made no sign, and I escaped by the way I had come.

‘ That night I determined to try and escape, by personating the King while Isabel should be taken for the Queen, and next morning I confided my plan to Isabel, who agreed to venture with me.

‘ For several days after this, Isabel worked alone in her chamber to manufacture an ephod and robe for me, like those worn by Isban-Israel, and a costume for herself like that worn by Ira. With her deft fingers she succeeded so well that I was astonished at the resemblance, and cheered her on by confident predictions of our success.

‘ Those garments, made in secret, were wetted with many a bitter tear, for her heart was nearly breaking at the change in her father and the loss of Katie, but she knew well that her father would not attempt to escape, for he was quite possessed with his theories and researches, and if we could but get free, I was certain I could easily raise a party to rescue him : in any case if we stayed, Isabel would be handed to Isban-Israel, and I swore I would not go alone.

‘ The night we had fixed upon came round at last, and, with my revolver, I started off at what I deemed to be about midnight, to see that the coast was clear.

'In the King's ante-chamber I couched for nearly an hour, and then Isban-Israel and Ira came forth and opened the rocky door through which I had come; I knew there were no other caves in this direction than those we occupied, and my heart fell like lead lest they should discover my absence; but they came back after a weary while, and opening the door leading to the great hall, passed down the corridor, Ira carrying a lantern.

'As the door fell back behind them, I sprang to my feet, and, entering the inner chamber where they slept, took from the floor one of the lanterns which lay about, and lit it by the lantern burning by the King's couch.

'While I was lighting it, I remembered the treasure-house, and quick as thought I crossed the outer chamber, and, applying my key, entered the secret hiding-place.

'The place was small and mouldy, and my flesh crept at the eerie-looking chest which glittered dimly by the flickering light; but suppressing my thoughts I hung the lantern to one of the minarets and dragged out two of the drawers and filled my rough robe with their contents. My hands shook so that I could hardly push back the empty drawers, but presently I did so, and with a curious feeling of sacrilege regained the outer room, and waited there till Isban-Israel and his sister retired to their chambers. Then, after a little while, I went to Isabel's chamber and called to her that the time was come, and she handed me my disguise. She herself was already dressed, and so well

had she done her work that, except in height, she was the exact counterpart of Ira.

'Hastily dressing myself in the clothes she gave me, I secured the jewels inside my robe, and called to Isabel to come out. If her disguise was good so also was mine, for she stopped in very fear as I stood before her, lantern in hand, and it was not till I spoke that she could realise the transformation. But with the ephod over my head and my figure drawn up to the uttermost, it must surely have been hard to distinguish me in that dull light, for the lantern burned but dully.

'I took her in my arms and kissed her, and as I held her I heard her whisper a pitiful little prayer to God that we might escape safely; but when she said it I could not join her, for somehow the jewels weighed upon my mind, and I half determined to abandon them. But even as I hesitated the feeling passed, and with one more kiss on her wet eyes, I drew the ephod closely about my head, while she carefully hid her face in the folds of the linen cloak. Then I turned the key and we stepped into the corridor. As I reclosed it, and we started on our perilous journey my heart grew very still, and the danger appalled me. Isabel too trembled as we stood in that narrow passage, but she was the first to recover; for with a little sob she nestled to me and whispered: "I will be brave, Adam. Go on."

'It was *I* who had need to be brave, and I knew it. The knowledge stung me into action, and side by side we walked without further words to the next door; it

opened easily, and we passed safely on to the King's ante-chamber, and here I expected to find our first danger—in finding Isban-Israel or Ira awake. But they made no sign, and we passed on.

'For the first time I applied my key to the bolt which led towards the great hall, and in my heart I feared the noise would awaken the sleepers; but no sound came from behind, and the great rock rolled back slowly, slowly, revealing the darkness beyond.

'We stepped through, and, obedient to my touch, Isabel held the lantern while I knelt down and turned the lower bolt. We were in one of the corridors through which I had been hurried when they brought me to the King's presence. I recognised it by the V-shaped roof, which seemed like a great stone wedge waiting to fall. At the farther end I opened another door with my key; and as the rock rolled back, two of the great Kafir guards stepped right in front with their long spears pointed full at us.

'I bent my head slightly and motioned them aside. And with a great throb in my breast I saw them step back and make obeisance, crying—

"Arkos! Isban-Israel!"

"Arkos! Ira-ben-Israel!"

'As we passed them I felt Isabel shiver, and bending down towards her I muttered softly—

"Courage, my darling! bear up."

'She answered with an almost imperceptible straightening of her supple figure, and we passed slowly round

the wall, for I did not as yet know my bearings, and was uncertain where the door leading towards the falls might be.

‘ We skirted round the great hall like two tall ghosts, and every now and then I looked into the niches in the walls for my late companions, but we saw no signs of them till after we had passed the great white altar.

‘ From the flame flickering upon the altar there came a faint odour of resinous wood. At the foot lay a sleeping form clothed all in white, and on the third step sat the acolyte whom I had seen before. As we passed him he bowed his head with a reverence, and made a little sign upon his breast. I drew myself up haughtily, and the youth seemed abashed, for by the light from the flame above I saw the tears flood his eyes and fall upon his white cheeks.

‘ Further on, again, we came upon a crib in which I saw the dull outlines of a human figure, and holding the light over the crib for a moment, I recognised Mahali.

‘ He opened his eyes, and glared angrily at us, and I felt that Isabel recognised him, and was about to speak, but as she turned impetuously towards him, he ground his teeth and spat at us wolfishly, and in his eyes I seemed to see the glare of incipient madness.

‘ I urged Isabel on feverishly, for the strain began to tell upon me, I was holding myself so straight, less unseen eyes should notice my height as less than that of the King’s; and such thoughts of obstructions, till

now unthought of, came crowding to my mind, that my brain began to reel, lest, after all, when I came to the door, I should overlook it, or betray myself by searching for the bolts. But we came at last to two more great sentinels, and with a gesture I waved them aside.

'They fell back respectfully, and Isabel held up the lantern while I tried to carelessly fit the revolver on the bolt. Our star seemed in the ascendant, for I saw the bolt at a glance, and as the door rolled back I looked down in triumph on Isabel's shrouded head. Betwixt the folds her sweet eyes were peeping out like stars, and as we passed through and I knelt down to close the door I felt warm drops fall on my hands. They were Isabel's tears.

'But we were surely safe now! As the door rolled back we hurried, hand in hand, down several steps and through an untenanted cave from which two passages led, one on the right and one on the left.

'We took the left at hazard, and after groping our way for a few feet we came upon more steps, and then into another cavern, and as we entered we heard again the roar of the great falls.

'Isabel gave a cry, and clutched my hand tighter as we entered.

'It was the cave in which she and Katie had been immured, and with renewed hope we hurried on. We passed safely on till at last we stood in the cave where the fight had been, and there, lolling on the floor, lay

one great sentinel, while the other walked slowly to and fro.

‘ As the light of the lantern illuminated the end of the cave with its dull glare the sentinel sprang forward with a shout, and his comrade rose quickly from the ground, but as their eyes fell upon us they drew back and humbly muttered—

“ Arkos! Isban-Israel.”

“ Arkos! Ira-ben-Israel.”

‘ I was trembling with excitement as we passed them and stepped down the rough staircase to where the dead “Hamie” alone kept guard. Isabel, too, seemed to share my feelings, and stepping down into the icy cave drew back her hood with shaking hands.

‘ And so we turned the last step, and came into the cave of the “Hamie.”

‘ And there, with the dead men ranged on either side, and a band of living “Hamie” behind her, stood Ira-ben-Israel!

CHAPTER X

ADAM VARNEY'S STORY—*continued*

‘I TOOK Isabel in my arms and faced the Queen. She stood regarding us with her cruel eyes aflame and an evil smile on her mouth, but she did not speak; and as the moments flew by the silence grew insupportable to Isabel, and she raised her head from which the hood had been removed, revealing all her wealth of golden hair.

‘As she turned her pale face towards Ira, a tremor of rage seemed to sweep over the Queen, and she raised her hand with a gesture which I had seen before when they tore Katie from us. At the signal the “Hamie” sprang forward, and though I fought like a wild beast in my despair I was easily overcome, and they dragged Isabel from me and bound me hand and foot, and left me on the ground.

‘I saw the Queen step up to Isabel with her cruel eyes agleam with jealous fury, and though my darling was bound so tightly that she could scarcely move, I saw Ira motion to the guards to draw the cords tighter still.

‘The cords cut into her tender flesh; and, maddened

at the sound of a low moan, I made a desperate effort to regain my feet, as I tottered unable to gain my balance one of the "Hamie" struck me down with a heavy blow on the head, and I felt the warm blood course over my face—heard Isabel's piteous cry of "Adam! oh, Adam!" and then lost all consciousness until I found myself being carried, still bound, by the "Hamie" through several passages.

'Almost as I recovered consciousness my bearers stopped in a small cavern whose depth was but six or seven feet at the most. The floor of the cavern was sandy and warm, and the air hot and oppressive with the smell of the lanterns carried by Ira and her satellites.

'As they threw me roughly on the sandy floor I saw Isabel lying bound beside me, while almost filling up the little cavern stood the "Hamie," whom Ira was addressing in her deep melodious voice.

'When she had done speaking, some of the "Hamie" took two long iron bolts about twenty inches long, each having at one end a small ring—with a club they drove the bolts into the walls, one on either side. And when both were well driven in, they drove about eighteen inches below each of them two more similar bolts forming a triangle on each side of the wall.

'When the last bolt had been driven in right up to the rings, Ira motioned the "Hamie" towards me, and they placed me in a sitting posture on the floor by one of the triangles.

'And then I knew my fate! Around my neck the Captain of the "Hamie" clasped this collar of gold. It shut upon my throat with a snap, and then one of the others brought a small iron ladle full of molten liquid, a few drops of which they poured upon the spring; the stuff seethed and shimmered in the ladle—I believe it was molten gold—here on my shoulder where the round scar is, that is where a little of it fell, and burned me as I sat helpless in my bonds. With raw hide they bound my golden collar to the topmost ring, so tightly that I could scarcely breathe, and then with the same kind of bonds they secured my arms at the elbows to the side rings. All this time Isabel had lain where they threw her on the sandy floor, but now, having finished with me, they raised her up and fastened her in the same way as myself to the rings on the other side.

'We were exactly opposite, and when the other fastenings were complete they drew off Isabel's sandals and bound each of her feet to one of mine—sole to sole. I did not at first perceive their subtle cruelty in thus binding our feet together, but when the men had finished their task, and Ira stood gloating over her fiendish work, I was seized with a paroxysm of anger and wrenched savagely at my bonds, but with my first movement Isabel gave a faint moan of pain, and then I saw why they had bound us together. Whichever one of us moved, ever so little, the other had perforce to move too, and with every movement I made, Isabel's body

was drawn towards me and her arms and throat were bruised by her bonds. Ira's baleful eyes roved over us cruelly, and as one of the "Hamie" placed a piece of baked meat and a gourd of water midway between and out of reach of either, she smiled!

'Apparently satisfied that we were securely bound, she said a few words to her followers and held up her lantern; then one by one they passed by us through the doorway, and as each one passed he made ironical obeisance and muttered "Arkos!"

'Last of all the Queen passed by, she turned her back upon me and gazed into Isabel's face for a few seconds; then she faced towards me and scanned me critically—I hoped she was relenting, but following her eyes I saw that she was carefully examining my bonds. Satisfied that they were secure she passed out, the heavy door grated, moved slowly forward and then closed, and Isabel and I were left to our fate. At first I tried to cheer her up, for even bound as we were it seemed impossible that we should die almost within arm's length of freedom, for it was not three feet from where I lay to the mouth of the cave, and we could hear the distant sound of the waterfall, and the chirping of insects, and could see in the grey morning light the slopes of the valley on the other side. But after hours of pain, struggling with my arms and head, I began to lose heart, for the bolts were driven so firmly into the rocky walls that I could not loosen them,

and it caused Isabel intense pain every time I struggled; for as I drew my body upward for a supreme effort she was drawn by the feet so that the pressure of the collar on her throat almost choked her.

'When, faint and exhausted, I ceased struggling, Isabel tried to comfort me, telling me to be brave and trust to the Creator of all things; but I was sullen and angry and could not resign myself to the fate which made us suffer so, and though my darling's sweet voice urged me to give up the vain attempt, I could not do it, but spent all the day in vain efforts to free myself, or to reach the bread and water.

'The sun rose and at midday the heat was stifling, in the afternoon it shone full in our faces, and the little cave was filled with its glare.

'When the night fell again I was stiff and sore, the collar had cut into my neck, and small particles of rock, dislodged in my efforts to free myself, had fallen between it and my neck and drifted into the raw gashes.

'The night brought us a cool breeze, but we could not sleep; our positions cramped and hurt us. As either one moved the other had perforce to move also, and the meat lying on the sandy floor had attracted hundreds of ants which crawled over us and attacked us with impunity.

'Isabel was calm and patient through it all. As I swung savagely at my bonds her tender voice would pierce the gathering gloom, urging me to

patience and resignation, and for a time her words would soothe me, until the thoughts of the awful death looming close before both of us would drive like lightning through my mind, and with mighty strains and heaves I strove with my bonds, till with trembling limbs and nearly bursting veins the paroxysm would pass, and then again out of the darkness would fall upon my ears the gentle tones of the voice I shall never hear again on earth. On the second day our sufferings grew intolerable, and by the pale grey light which slowly penetrated the cave I could see Isabel's sad white face faintly limned against the gloomy wall and hear her laboured breath as she strove to keep upright, for every time she gave way to her weariness the golden collar tightened round her throat, and she had perforce to draw herself upright. As mid-day approached a swarm of flies, attracted partly by the blood which had oozed from my neck, throat and ankles, and partly by the putrefying meat, came buzzing in—a horrid swarm, purple and blue—they settled on the decaying meat, and buzzed and crawled over my creeping flesh, fighting for vantage at the rawest places, and when satiated, settling lazily about my head and body until their appetites returned.

‘The close stagnation of the place together with her cramped position caused Isabel intolerable agony, and her sufferings from thirst and hunger lent a pitiful tremulous chord to her voice, yet in spite of

all she strove so bravely, oh, so bravely, to hide her pain from me. And ever as I swung backwards and forwards, and cursed with bitter words those who had left us there, her plaintive voice urged me to resignation.

'The day wore on, her voice grew fainter and fainter, the buzzing brood crept deeper and deeper into my bleeding flesh, and crawling slowly to and fro, hummed and buzzed over their horrid meal. A slight wind hurtled in, and sent the sand into our eyes and mouths; over the floor small lizards glided their snake-like ways, my tongue swelled up, and in my eyes a rheumy film gathered, my head whirled, my veins seemed nigh to bursting, and beneath my collar the ants battled with the flies for sustenance.

'As the sun went down Isabel's voice sounded faint and far away, and though I strained my eyes to see her, the pale wan face grew at last invisible in the gathering gloom, and at last only an occasional long-drawn sigh assured me that she still lived.

'At last—not having heard her voice for a long time—hearing only the eternal roar of the falls, and the sleepy buzzing of the flies as they circled insatiate round my tired head, I called to her, but she did not answer. Again and again I called on her for just one sign that she lived; but only the fantastic echo of my own hoarse voice, mingled with the distant roar of the falling waters, replied, and then indeed I knew that my darling was dead or dying, and with one great

frenzied effort I brought my arms together, and forced the great bolts from the wall.

‘The strain set the blood coursing to my head in a wild wave; but even then, half delirious as I was, I picked madly at the thongs which bound my collar to the central ring, and presently I was free!

‘I bent down and loosened the bonds which bound our feet, and made an effort to rise; but my limbs were cramped and weak, and I had to crawl slowly and painfully to my darling’s side.

‘With eager hope I called her name, and with my trembling fingers unfastened slowly and with infinite difficulty the bonds which held her in their cruel grasp; but ah, me! ah, me! Freedom had come too late! I pressed my swollen lips to hers in an agony of despair; but she was too weak to answer; only for one short second she faintly pressed my hand, and then—even as I loosened the last rough thong which held her tender arms—her spirit passed away, and though we were unbound at last, her pure soul had gone to its eternal rest, and I knelt, a broken-hearted man, with my dear dead love in my arms; and in my heart a bitterness and wrath that seemed to sear it like a red-hot iron.

‘I do not know how long I knelt holding my dead darling’s cold white face against my own; but at length, in sheer weakness, I laid the dear burden down, and in broken words muttered grim curses through my cracked and bleeding lips.

At my feet lay the loathsome food at which two lizards nibbled hungrily, beyond them lay the pitcher of water: in my mad despair I fell upon the creeping things, and crushed them with my hands, and dashed the earthen jar against the wall.

'Then my strength was spent, and with my darling's head pillowed against my breast, I fell asleep. . . .

'When I awoke, the sun was full in the heavens, upon my ears fell the noise of the African insects and the distant boom of the falls; with a shudder I lifted my head from its resting-place, and at sight of the cold still face my tears gushed out, and I wished that I was dead. But presently my thoughts of sorrow gave way to plans of revenge, and I pictured Ira and Isban-Israel bound as we had been, and at the mind-picture I laughed with fiendish glee.

'Mad? they said so afterwards; perhaps I was, perhaps my madness gave me strength to take the slight girl-form in my arms, and pass out of the noisome cave into the valley below. Yes! perhaps my madness gave me strength for that, and to carry her over the saddle of the hill down the rocky path below the falls, and lay her reverently beneath the awning of the wagon, which stood there just as it had stood when we set out to rescue her so long ago.

'They have said so often that I was mad. Was I mad when, having left my darling's body in the wagon, I crawled slowly to the riverside to drink, and when I had drunk my fill was I mad when I recognised my

off-leader, "Whlmann," as he came slowly up to drink too?—ay, and "Aftermann" and "Blaubank" and "Swartboy" and four others of the team of which I was once so proud! Was I mad when I inspanned the patient brutes then and there, and yoked them to the weather-worn wagon, and in a weak faint voice that sounded strangely in my ears, tried to urge them forwards with the old cries?—

"Yak! Yak! Whlmann—Yak—Aftermann" tehk!

'No!—I was not mad then, let them say what they will, for as I lie here now it all comes back to me, how in my cracked weak voice I urged the oxen on, and ever and again peeped furtively behind to scan the face of the falls in fear of pursuit; but none came, and the cattle made good way.

'All alone with my dead Isabel I trekked till my weary team were spent, then outspanning them, I searched the wagon and found some old strips of biltong, and on it made a frugal meal.

'And while the cattle grazed about the wagon, I dug with my knife a shallow trench beneath a spreading mimosa tree; and there when I had wrapped her in a piece of the wagon tent, I buried Isabel, and to mark her last resting-place, when I should come again, I set three great ox-yokes at her head.

'I remember that when I had refilled her grave, and sat beside it in utter desolation, that the wild desire for action came on me, and I inspanned the unwilling oxen and trekked forward.

'There were but a few strips of biltong, but on the plains were a few prickly-pears, and in some way I kept myself alive till I reached the Victoria Falls; here a native hunter provided me with food, and at Tati a native blacksmith attempted to take the collar from my neck: but he failed, and I never let any one try again. From Tati I travelled slowly but surely till by near Christmas-time I reached Eerstelling again.

'I reached Eerstelling, but if I was not mad then, the people tried hard to make me so. They stared in wonder at my garments—the ephod and gown—they derided my uneven span of bullocks, for Swartboy died at Umpatilli's kraal. And when I told them of the "Hamie," and Ira, and Isban-Israel, they shook their heads and pointed curiously at me. And then, indeed, I must have gone mad. *Mad! Mad!* would not you be mad if always by day and night, in the crowded streets, or in the lonely veldt, you saw a sweet pitiful girlish face resting its white loveliness against the sombre rocks! and saw cruel thongs cutting the tender flesh, and heard a faint voice whispering, "Ah! Adam! I am dying, dear. Goodbye"? . . . Mad!!!

'Ah! and would not you drink, and drink, and drink deep draughts to give you sleep, to cloud your teeming brain until it was powerless to conjure up that dim white face with its setting of loathsome swarms of blue and purple flies, fighting and buzzing about the drooping mouth, and lighting on the tired lids that hid the tender eyes. *Ha! deliver me out of great*

*waters . . . from the hand of strange children . . . send
thine hand from . . . above ! Mad ! Mad !*

NURSE FIRMIN'S STORY.

This is as nearly as I can remember the story told me by our strange patient during the time he was in the hospital; he died with the word 'Mad' upon his lips; only the doctor and myself were by him, and his face was terrible to look upon; for as he spoke his last words his great chest heaved and fell, and over his mouth the bloody foam gathered and trickled into his matted beard.

On the day previous to his death he wrote in a large schoolboy hand a brief will, which was witnessed by the Doctor and Nurse Rose; when it was opened it read as follows :—

'ADELAIDE HOSPITAL,
'ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA,
'18th September 1877.

'I, ADAM VARNEY, formerly of Ilminster, County of Somersetshire, England, Gamekeeper, but now a patient in the Adelaide Hospital, being in my right mind, do hereby give, will, and bequeath absolutely to Isabel Firmin, my nurse in the Hospital, the residue of the jewels of Isban-Israel, of which I have told her; and she is to do with them what she thinks fit: Also I give and bequeath to her my pocket-book with the written vocabulary of the tribe of Isban-Israel, and

the plan of the great caves: the jewels are in my chest in my lodgings in Halifax Street.

Signed, ' ADAM VARNEY.'

'Witnesses,' { J. L. Farron, M.D.
Rose Mary Gray, Nurse.'

The lines were very tremulous, but written in a large hand, and quite plain, the doctor took the trouble of proving the Will for me, and about three weeks ago my bequest was formally handed over to me; and that is why I am no longer 'Nurse Firmin.'

But with my accession to wealth—for the jewels were almost priceless—I have fallen heiress to many thoughts. Was Adam Varney sane when he told his strange narrative? Or had his fearful excesses told on his mind and clouded his memory as to how he really secured the princely jewels which were stored in his great box?

For that he had drunk to an appalling extent my inquiries soon made clear, the person whom I employed to investigate the matter brings me news of long-continued excesses in which, shut up alone in his own room, he drank and drank, till at last one night his landlord refused to send him more drink, and then his strange lodger, without replying, had left the house and walked straight on to King William Street, looking neither to the right nor left; just by the General Post Office he had reeled and fallen, and they brought him to the Hospital.

My employée has also ascertained that the man arrived a month ago by the barque ‘*Haidee*’ from Port Natal, and that on the voyage out he was regarded as a madman, and avoided by every one on account of his strange mutterings, and his restlessness.

This is all I can learn, but although it seems unreasonable, I cannot believe that all his story was fictitious: in his illness he spoke mostly in a manner which carried conviction with it—and why should he invent a story such as this, when he knew he was dying?

And as I sit by my window in the evenings, my thoughts wander to that far land of which he spoke, and, if his tale was true, did he, I wonder, mean me to live quietly on the jewels of Isban-Israel? or did he wish me to use them for the purpose of rescuing Captain Clayton and Katie from the hands of their mysterious captors?

Now, the more I think of these things, the more it seems to me that maybe his strange story is true, and somewhere, far beyond civilisation, there lives the strange people of whom he told me; and with them—prisoners for life—the father and sister of my namesake Isabel, awaiting their redemption.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

DR. JAMES ASCOTT was in a most unprofessional attitude, and one which, could they have seen it, would doubtless have scandalised most of the few patients whose names were entered in his books. Not only was he sitting astride of one hard uncomfortable chair, but his feet were resting upon the rungs of another, and he was smoking a common cherrywood pipe; hard by on a small table lay an open book, at which he occasionally glanced with a half-humorous half-angry gleam in his grey eyes.

A peal at the hall-door caused him to remove his feet from the rungs of the chair and hastily put down the half-smoked pipe; he had only just done this and risen to his feet, when a diminutive lad ushered in a tall middle-aged woman, who took in the situation at a glance, and with a wintry smile motioned him to resume his pipe.

‘I don’t want to disturb you,’ she said quietly; ‘go

on with your smoke—I have come to talk to you if you are not busy.'

James Ascott handed her a chair, and disregarding the invitation to continue his smoke, pushed the open book nearer to her.

'There!' he said, rapidly turning over the few leaves which were written upon, 'those are my engagements for the six weeks during which I have been in practice for myself, nurse—I beg your pardon,' he added hastily, 'I should have said Mrs. Firmin.'

'Oh! call me nurse still, I am used to it. I almost wish I had never left the Hospital.'

'The old doubts?' he asked quizzically.

'Yes! the old doubts, growing stronger with every day—grown so strong now that I have made up my mind to take action at once, and that is why I have come to you.'

The Doctor stared at her. 'Do you expect to convert me after all?' he asked satirically.

The woman met his gaze steadily. 'I do not intend trying to convert you. I want your assistance in another way. You are acquainted with a young fellow named Dalmayne.'

'What! Bertie Dalmayne? yes, I know him.'

'I want you to introduce him to me.'

'For what purpose?'

'I intend to ask him to lead an expedition to Africa.'

'To find the Magic Mountains?'

'Yes, to find the Magic Mountains: you may smile,

Dr. Ascott. I do not mind in the least, but I do want you to introduce me to Mr. Dalmayne.'

'Do you know him? what put *him* into your head?'

'He came to the Hospital to see one of his station hands who was ill: in going round the ward he saw Adam Varney, and was attracted by his appearance—he spoke to me and asked what Varney suffered from; it was a day or two before he died, and I told Mr. Dalmayne the part of the story I had then heard. He was interested, and said he had always looked upon Africa as a wonderland, and had a good mind to go and see if the story was true.'

'He was only joking,' said the Doctor, gently, 'you have let this story take too great a hold of you, nurse.'

'He was not joking. He was quite in earnest, I am sure.'

'Did he ever go again to the Ward?'

'I do not know. As you remember, when Adam Varney died I was taken ill myself for a little while, and when I recovered, it was to find myself a rich woman by his will.

'But it seems you know Dalmayne already. Why ask me to introduce you?'

'I want him to know all about the affair from you first.'

'But I think the whole thing is an illusion, my dear woman, and I should certainly tell Dalmayne so, and I think he would attach some weight to my opinion.'

'I am willing to risk that.'

'But really this is most extraordinary! a few chance words eight or ten weeks ago, and you immediately fix upon the young fellow as a suitable man for this wild-goose chase—don't you know he is the son of a rich man—a rich man himself too, and with his hands full of work in connection with his father's stations?'

'I wish to meet him,' Nurse Firmin answered calmly, 'and I hope you will kindly do what I ask you. If he does not wish to go, or has no interest in what you call my hallucination, there will be no harm done.'

'What a pertinacious beggar she is,' thought the Doctor, as he studied the stern grave face before him. 'I believe that fellow Varney has upset her mental balance with his mad talk.'

Aloud he said: 'Well, Nurse, I don't like to refuse you anything, but you must quite understand that, believing as I do that the story is all rubbish, I shall tell Dalmayne so.'

'I have no objection to that,' she answered; 'can you say when I am likely to hear from you?'

'If you sit still for five minutes you will see Dalmayne for yourself, he is coming here—in fact he *is* here,' he added, as a brisk peal rang through the house.

They sat silently regarding each other as the outer door was opened and shut, presently vigorous steps sounded on the stairs, and the door was flung open by a tall, strongly-built, sun-browned fellow, whose 'Hullo, Ascott, old man,' was stopped short on finding his friend with a visitor.

Dr. Ascott shook hands with the new-comer and introduced him to Nurse Firmin, adding that he understood they had met before.

'I should think so!' cried Bertram Dalmayne energetically, shaking hands with the self-contained, grey-faced woman. 'Why, I've been thinking about that big African fellow nearly ever since—did he tell you any more?' he asked anxiously.

She drew a bundle of papers from her handbag, and held them out to him. 'He told me *this*, and at Dr. Ascott's suggestion I wrote it down.'

'I only suggested your doing so because you were worrying and fretting over it,' interpolated the Doctor.

'Whatever your reason, I did as you recommended—and, here is Adam Varney's story,' she said, speaking to Bertie Dalmayne.

Dalmayne took up the bulky package gingerly. 'I couldn't read it just now,' he said awkwardly; 'there is rather a lot of it, and I am a slow reader of manuscript—may I take it home?'

The woman looked at him disappointedly. 'I thought you were interested,' she said, 'but it does not matter.'

There was that in her voice which made Bertram Dalmayne take the parcel quickly. 'If you'll let me read it, Ascott, I will start right away—or, I'll tell you what, old man, *you* shall read it aloud—eh, Mrs. Firmin?'

The Doctor growled. 'I have read it already.'

'But you are a capital reader, and I could give my

attention to it ever so much better if you would—come, man, you've got nothing else to do, and it's a scorching hot afternoon outside.'

James Ascott sighed and shrugged his shoulders, but being in the main a good-tempered fellow, and having a very sincere regard for Dalmayne, he took up the manuscript, and when Dalmayne had settled himself on one of the uncomfortable chairs, he began to read.

A good reader, and a little vain of his powers, he began in a loud clear voice the story of Isabel Firmin, but as he read further on, his voice grew less loud and more sympathetic, and once well into his subject he gave himself up entirely to it, and read it with such pathos and art, that he not only entranced Dalmayne, but actually began to feel an interest in the story himself. When he had finished the last page the hot Australian sun was sinking in the west, the room had grown darker, and with the darkness came into the reader's mind for the first time the possibility of there being some truth in the strange story he had read. He sat quite still, struck by the newness of his idea—opposite him, erect upon her chair, Nurse Firmin remained stiff and prim, her sphinx-like face turned towards the window, her eyes gazing out into the darkening sky, and only the strong pressure of her hands together showing that she was feeling any emotion.

Dalmayne sprang from his seat. 'I believe it!' he cried. 'I don't care what you say, Ascott—I believe

the poor fellow spoke the truth—I can’t help feeling it.’

Nurse Firmin turned to him. ‘I am glad you believe it,’ she said. ‘I wished you to hear the story because I want you to go in search of that poor lost girl.’

‘What!’ He turned on her in amazement. ‘Do you mean it?’

‘I do indeed.’

‘But—you know nothing of me—you don’t know if I am to be trusted—what ever made you think of *me*?’

‘One of your men was in the Hospital——’

‘Mallee Dick?’

‘Yes—that is what you called him—he told me of your exploits in the far north—that you were kind and brave, an unrivalled bushman, a man not easily daunted.’

Dalmaine’s bronzed face turned a deeper tint. ‘Oh, Mallee Dick!’ he said deprecatingly; ‘he always swears by me, you know. You must not believe all he says.’

‘Will you think it over?’ she said, walking close up to him. ‘Will you at least consider it for a little while, it would cost you nothing, you would see a strange land and a strange people. I would equip the expedition thoroughly.’

‘Oh! I do not doubt that. It is a bit sudden, and I have my business, and my father must be consulted.’

‘You will consider my proposal then?’

He looked down at her for a moment in silence.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'I will consider it, I will talk it over with my father to-night. May I take the manuscript to read to him?'

She nodded without speaking.

'It's no use trying to get you to read it to the Pater, I suppose, Ascott?'

The Doctor hesitated. 'You could read it yourself, couldn't you?'

'Oh, I could; but not as you did. I am not much of an elocutionist, you know.'

'Very well, I will come up with you and read it to Mr. Dalmayne.'

Nurse Firmin peered at him in the waning light; there was a new note in his voice. 'Are *you* beginning to believe it too?' she asked him quietly.

'I am beginning to think there is possibly a grain of truth in it,' he answered hesitatingly; 'but whether I shall think the same in broad daylight is a different thing. In this half-light marvels are easier to believe in than in the garish light of day.'

She smiled a little sadly.

'That is a man's feeling; to me it matters nothing whether it is midnight or midday—always I can feel something stronger than myself urging me to action. I can see a slight young girl wearying for her freedom, I hear her moans in my sleep; I see Ira, the King's sister, with her baleful eyes regarding the captive English girl's beauty, and I awake from terrible dreams in which Isban-Israel, deprived by death of the one

sister, draws nearer and nearer to the other. I hear her cry out in her helplessness. I see her thrust him back with her tiny hands, and I hear her piteous prayers for deliverance. . . .'

The two men regarded her in astonishment; her voice was no longer the harsh unmusical voice they had previously heard, but one which the passion and intensity of her feelings caused to vibrate and ring with pity and despair.

Bertram Dalmayne took up his hat. 'Ascott,' he said hurriedly, 'come along at once—I believe it all. Mrs. Firmin, I will see you to-morrow.' And with that they left the room together.

'That is a strange woman, Ascott,' Dalmayne said, as the two stood at the Doctor's garden gate and watched her tall spare figure.

'One of the strangest I have ever met; until Varney came to the hospital, I had only noticed her as a careful and untiring nurse, rather cold and hard in her manner of speech, but with a rare turn for nursing. When he came I saw more of her, for I was intensely interested in the case; although I never attached much importance to his ravings, I saw that she did, and under the excitement she showed quite another side of her character.'

'She spoke of having been ill—was it serious?'

'She brooded too much over the story he told her, and worried herself as to her responsibility; not crediting his tale, I tried to laugh her out of it, but she was so impressed with its truth, that I had to take her

seriously—if she had not eased her mind by writing it down as a step towards future proceedings, I believe she would have developed brain fever.'

The two men walked up North Terrace towards the Adelaide Club in silence for a while, until Dalmayne touching his companion's arm to attract his attention, said in a questioning voice—

'Do you really think there is any truth in it?'

'Until I read the story to you I did not; as I read, a doubt crept into my mind that, strange as the story was, it might possibly have some foundation in fact.'

'I am certain it has.'

'Of course,' resumed the Doctor, 'I don't believe in the remnant of the lost tribes.'

'Don't you? well, I do.'

'My dear fellow, it is absurd on the face of it. I grant there may be some cave-dwellers in that portion of Africa—but—they are not Jews, I'll stake my reputation on that; and as for the race of giants, of course that is only a traveller's tale.'

'Varney himself was a gigantic fellow?'

'Yes. An exceptionally fine man, one in a thousand, but you won't find a whole race of men in existence to compare with him, and in the MS., you remember, they are said to be much bigger.'

Dalmayne was silent for a few minutes, then in a lower voice he said: 'Look here, Ascott, you only know me as a bushman down town for a spell; you know

nothing of my life, or, for the matter of that, of life in the Australian bush at all.’

‘ Quite so—beyond what I have learned from books and newspapers, and an occasional chat with bushmen, I know very little of the bush.’

‘ Shall I tell you what first took my fancy in that story of Varney’s ? ’

‘ Yes—go on.’

‘ Allaleena is one of our out-stations. It is quite different from the others ; the country is very little known ; a stern, wild, inhospitable waste in the summer months, but in the winter, when the rains fall, it completely changes its aspect ; the ground, which in summer is hard and bare, is covered in a few weeks after the rains by short rich grass, the dry creeks of summer turn into rapidly flowing torrents, and the whole face of the country is transformed. Two years ago I was up there, and in the Peenie-Peenie Ranges, I came across just such a waterfall as Varney described, only on a much smaller scale. Just as the waters at the Umganowie fall fan-shaped into the river, so did the waters at Peenie-Peenie, and in just the same way the inner waters fell plump into a huge crevice, and were lost to sight. Part of my business here now is to obtain boring appliances for sinking for what I believe is an underground river running from the Peenie-Peenie Ranges across the Wirralowie country.’

‘ The falls may be in existence—they are a minor matter ; where the improbability comes in, to my mind,

is in the fact of these people having been for so long resident in a place which, although unknown to Europeans, must surely have been traversed by the Kafirs.'

'But can't you imagine, my dear fellow, that with their arts and sleight-of-hand, these strange people may have given the place an awesome reputation? Varney tells how the Mountain Range is supposed to be the abode of the Devil. May not this have been brought about purposely by the strange race, in order to ensure their privacy?'

'It would require a big stretch of imagination to believe it, but they could hardly make the mountain appear and disappear at will.'

'That is hardly fair. Varney says that when the sun shone the Range was not visible at a distance, but that when the sky was overcast it came into view: now, if you consider that the mountain range is possibly an outcrop of ore or some iridescent substance, such as mica—or perhaps of some mineral as yet unknown to science, would not the rays of the sun in that scorching climate give it a dazzling appearance, which would prevent its being distinguishable from the miles and miles of sand which surround it? or might not the drifting sand cause a mirage?'

'I should say it was highly improbable.'

'Well—here is the Club; let us see my father first, and I'll try to convince you afterwards.'

CHAPTER II

‘AND you mean to say that it is all settled ? that you are really on the point of going to South Africa, Dalmayne ?’

‘I really am. Mrs. Firmin and myself leave in about a week for Cape Town. I only wish you were coming too, Ascott.’

‘I almost wish I was ! It is hard work getting up a practice here, for the place literally swarms with Doctors, and I made a bad mistake in throwing up my appointment as House Surgeon in the Hospital.’

‘It is a pity you don’t believe in the expedition, Ascott, for I have a commission to enlist a medical man in case of accidents.’

Dr. Ascott stared. ‘It seems almost incredible to me—the whole thing is so queer,’ he said presently. ‘Here you are, the son of one of the Shepherd Kings, throwing up your business and going to the Dark Continent to rescue a man and girl of whom you had not heard a word until a few weeks ago, and whose very existence is problematical.’

‘Wait till I come back, Ascott. I have a presentiment I shall be successful.’

‘You have made me restless, confound you . . . is

it absolutely necessary for one to be a believer in the expedition before enrolment ?'

'Are you serious ?'

'Partly,' said the Doctor whimsically.

'Well, look here ; the truth is, Mrs. Firmin *wants* you to go, she told me to sound you, and if you are in earnest she will recoup you handsomely.'

'What on earth would people say ?'

'Who on earth is going to tell them what you are going for ?'

'Is it to be kept secret, then ?'

'Absolutely.'

'Who else is going ?'

'Mrs. Firmin goes with me to the Cape. Mallee Dick, one of my station hands, is the only other person I am taking from here, unless you go.'

'Give me an hour or two to consider it—the idea of the adventure is agreeable, but it means a year or two lost in professional life.'

'Oh ! hang the professional life. I'm off to the North to-morrow on business. I shall be back on Wednesday, let me know then.'

They shook hands and parted,—the Australian to transact business with Mrs. Firmin, the young English doctor to his own house to consider the strange offer.

He had not been ten minutes in his room when the mail was delivered, and, putting away the thought of Dalmayne and his expedition, he opened his correspondence.

Twenty minutes later he was at Mrs. Firman's residence and was confronting Dalmayne and his late nurse.

‘ Good gracious, Ascott, what's the matter ? ’ cried Dalmayne.

‘ Read that, ’ gasped the doctor, thrusting a letter towards him.

The letter was a bulky one, and Dalmayne sat down before he began to read it.

‘ Who is it from ? ’ he said, scanning the signature with knitted brows.

‘ My brother, John Ascott—read it aloud. ’

Dalmayne settled himself comfortably and began—

‘ PELHAM HOUSE, ELTHAM,

‘ KENT, ENGLAND, 24th December 1877.

‘ DEAR JIM,—Before I get to business allow me to congratulate you on your determination to sever your connection with the hospital and begin business on your own account. I am quite sure of your being successful, and by the time you get this I hope you will be quite settled in your practice. You will get this about Xmas day, and I trust it will be a very happy one.

‘ Well, now to business. Some weeks ago a gentleman called at my office. His card bore the name Sir George Pomeroy, and he is a major of the —th.

‘ He opened this interview by saying that as it was an affair upon which he and his family solicitor did

not agree he had made inquiries and finally fixed upon *ME* as a young gentleman in whom he could thoroughly confide, and thereupon bound me to secrecy.'

'I say, Ascott, old man!' interjected Dalmayne, putting down the letter, 'am I to read this? Isn't it private?'

'No—go on, it concerns yourself and Mrs. Firmin.'

'Many years ago,' Dalmayne read, 'an English gentleman named Haydon was residing at Haydon Hall, Somerset, a very old and beautiful residence which had been in the family for a great number of years. He was a widower with one son, "Lindsay Carroll Haydon——"'

'Great Scott! why, this is Adam Varney's story over again!' ejaculated Dalmayne, and Mrs. Firmin bent eagerly forward with an unspoken question in her eyes.

'For goodness sake read it through,' retorted Dr. Ascott.

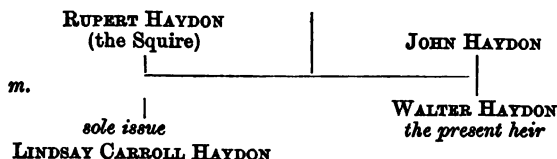
'One son, Lindsay Carroll Haydon, who, while with his regiment at Aldershot, became enamoured of a pretty girl, the daughter of a small tradesman. The young fellow, knowing his father to be a great stickler for birth and breeding, and a hot-tempered old gentleman to boot, married the girl clandestinely and for a time all went well.

'The young girl was a pretty, vain, frivolous creature, without any refinement, and utterly unsuited to her husband, who was a nineteenth century Galahad. To make a long story short, she intrigued with one of Lindsay Carroll's non-commissioned officers, a dashing

young sergeant, and before long the unhappy husband had a rude awakening—there was no doubt of the wife's guilt, she gloried in it, and the shock nearly killed young Haydon. For weeks he was dangerously ill, when he recovered his regiment had gone abroad, and the wretched woman had disappeared from view. He resigned his commission, saw none of his friends, and after a short stay at Haydon Hall, went out to South Africa in search of big game. He was accompanied on his journey by an immensely powerful young fellow named Adam Varney, a wild, reckless young scamp, who had been acting as underkeeper at the Hall; his father being head-keeper and an old and valued servant of the Haydon Family.

About eight months later Squire Haydon received a letter from Varney advising him of his son's death. Varney sent back all the dead man's things with a balance-sheet, which appeared correct, though scarcely drawn up in legal style. A cousin of Lindsay Haydon's is now the old Squire's heir—this is Part I. of the chain of events which I have to unfold.

'To make it quite clear to you I subjoin a genealogical table:—



'Now for Part II. One of the most dashing officers about London many years ago was Captain Gordon Clavering Apsley Clayton, who made a brilliant match in marrying Grace Ann Pomeroy, the only daughter and heiress of Sir George Pomeroy of Burton Abbey, Kent. By his wife Captain Clayton had two children, both girls, "Isabel Ann" and "Kathleen Clavering" Clayton.

'The captain being an only son and well off, and his wife being Sir George Pomeroy's only child and heiress, they were well-provided for, and Clayton eventually sold out, and when not mixed up in the whirl of London gaieties, or shooting or hunting, devoted his time to abstruse studies, for which he always had a strong inclination. His knowledge of chemistry and languages is said to have been wonderful in a man who spent so much time in society.

'When Isabel, the eldest girl, was eleven, the mother died, and Clayton nearly went distracted; the girls were sent to Burton Abbey and Clayton buried himself in Africa for several years. When he reappeared he was a different man. He had, as I have said, always been known as clever and accomplished, but on his return some papers which he wrote on the "Original Language" created such a profound sensation that he was hailed as a genius. In the middle of the *furore* which he had created, he disappeared suddenly, and Sir George Pomeroy only heard from him some months after, when he wrote that he was starting for the interior.

‘ In the meantime Isabel had developed symptoms which gave her grandfather great uneasiness, and Sir George promptly telegraphed to his son-in-law to that effect.

‘ As a result of the telegram Clayton returned to England, and eventually, with the concurrence of his medical adviser, took the two girls to South Africa, intending to try if the bracing air of Natal would restore his elder daughter’s health.

‘ For a time Sir George heard regularly from the girls ; after a while, however, there was a gap in the correspondence, and, when the next letter came, he learned to his astonishment and dismay that the girls had been leading a nomadic life with their father, who had equipped a large caravan, and was leisurely travelling northwards towards the Transvaal. The letters were written in high spirits, and physically the girls seemed in good case, but Sir George was vexed at the idea of his grand-daughters and co-heiresses being exposed to the privations of such a life, and wrote his son-in-law a long and sharp letter. To this no reply was received, nor did any letters come from the girls.

‘ Anxious and worried, Sir George waited until his patience was worn out, and then despatched an agent to ascertain where the travellers were. The agent had no difficulty in finding them ; they were residing at a remote village named Eerstelling, and were well and happy.

‘ Repeated letters from Sir George brought no reply,

and a year later he despatched a second agent who was instructed to point out that he (Sir George) was very old and failing fast, and to urge Captain Clayton to return with his daughters to England, to take up their proper position.

'This agent returned unsuccessful. The Captain and his daughters had left Eerstelling on an expedition to the interior, and had started so long before the arrival of the agent, that it was impossible to trace them.

'Sir George Pomeroy died some time ago, and his nephew and successor is the Major Sir George Pomeroy who called upon me.

'Now the Major is not only 'Sir George,' but, if his cousins are dead, is also the heir to all the late Baronet's property, including Burton Abbey and Kingsford.

'This is Part II.

'Now for Part III. The present Sir George, immediately after his uncle's death, despatched a detective-agent to Eerstelling, with the result that it has been ascertained beyond a doubt, that Adam Varney (of whom I spoke in Part I.), *and who was last heard of in Adelaide*, can throw some light upon the whereabouts of Captain Clayton and his daughters.

'Some months after the second agent left Eerstelling, Captain Clayton returned to that place—ALONE, much greyer, broken in health, and WITHOUT HIS DAUGHTERS. Adam Varney appeared on the scene, where he came from I do not know, and he and Captain Clayton, after spending a very short time at Eerstelling, trekked off

suddenly one night with an escort composed entirely of Kafirs. They are known to have progressed at least as far as *Tati*.

‘ Again, months later, Varney passed through Eerstelling, driving a dilapidated wagon drawn by a miserable set of oxen. He is reported to have been fantastically dressed, and to have been either raving mad or intoxicated. A man of great physical strength, and known to be a wild and reckless fellow, he was not molested by the few people who constituted the population of Eerstelling, and he passed through the place without having any speech with the white people. Some of the Kafirs aver that he fired shots at them from his rifle when they approached the wagon, but this has not been confirmed.

‘ At the beginning of the current year, a man, answering to Varney’s description, boarded a barque bound for Adelaide, and remained on board in spite of the captain’s threats. At last, when force was about to be resorted to, he took the captain downstairs, and eventually sailed in the barque *Haidée*. The captain of the *Haidée*, on his arrival in Adelaide, landed his passenger and returned to Mauritius with flour; from there he went to Cape Town and sold several magnificent stones. Owing to their exceeding value he got into trouble, until he produced witnesses to prove that he received them from Varney, as payment for his passage.

‘ And now you will see what I want you to do. Get a clever detective and hunt up this Adam Varney; cable

any news you may receive from him relative to the fate of the Clayton family.

'I have written this at reckless speed in order to catch the mail, for every day is precious. If I have been obscure, I will explain in a later letter.

'Varney is some six feet five or six in height if not more, has very large greyish blue eyes, and jet-black eyebrows and hair, his beard is supposed to be long and tawny, with darker streaks about the side. He is described as a man of such striking appearance, that once seen he cannot be forgotten, so you should easily run him to earth.

'I enclose a draft for expenses, and I want you, Jim, old man, to see to this yourself; don't bother about professional etiquette or anything else, a number of people's happiness hangs on the issue, and if, as I suspect, there has been foul play, and Adam Varney is implicated, you will be doing society a good turn in assisting us to unearth a cruel and bloodthirsty wretch.

'To-morrow, I see Sir George Pomeroy, to arrange for another agent to visit the Transvaal; and if his inquiries justify him in doing so, he will be authorised to enlist a party of men to search for the missing girls and their father.

'Sir George Pomeroy's suspicions point to Captain Clayton's having discovered some priceless gems, and having been done to death by the man Varney. Of the girls' fate we can form no conclusion. I will not

say that I quite agree with Sir George's theory, but it is possible.

'Sir George Pomeroy offers £500 to any one giving a clew which will lead to definite information about his missing relatives. I daresay such a reward will have an effect upon the South Australian detectives. I sincerely hope they will be successful, for poor Sir George is suffering much anxiety, and would, I am sure, willingly forego his inheritance to welcome his cousins back in England.

'He is a wealthy man now, and has no need of the money; up to lately he has been absorbed in his profession, but now he thinks of nothing else but his cousins, and if he were not afraid of missing some information here, he would have journeyed to the Transvaal himself. As it is, he has promised to wait for a reply from you before he thinks of searching personally. We only heard from Marron (the detective agent) that Varney was in Australia, late this afternoon.

'Now I hope I have explained everything clearly. It is two o'clock in the morning: Dorothy and Rose sent their love to you when they looked in to say good-night.—Good-bye, old man, your affectionate brother,

JOHN ASCOTT.

'DR. JAMES ASCOTT,

'ADELAIDE HOSPITAL,

'ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

'P.S.—I enclose a memorandum of dates, places,

and ages of the various people I have mentioned—this may be of service.'

For a moment after Dalmayne stopped reading there was a dead silence in the room, then with a spring he stood erect and looked round on his companions.

'I don't care what Sir George Pomeroy thinks,' he said excitedly, 'I don't believe Varney did anything of the sort.'

Mrs. Firmin glanced at the speaker and smiled: 'I am sure he did not—more than ever, since you read that letter, do I believe the story he told me.'

'I'm hanged if I understand it at all,' exclaimed the doctor; 'the two stories fit in well enough. I wish to goodness we were able to start at once.'

'Then you are going?' cried Dalmayne.

'If Mrs. Firmin still cares to have me, I will. I don't know whether your enthusiasm is catching, but it has got into my blood, and neither of you can be more anxious than I am to start.'

'You will write to your brother, I suppose?'

'I shall wire him that Varney is dead, and that he told the story of his life before he died; and if you consent, Mrs. Firmin, I will say a party is on the eve of leaving South Australia to investigate. Would you mind my doing that?'

'I do not think it could do any harm. You have my permission.'

‘ Well, that is settled, and I must not interrupt Dalmayne’s interview.’

‘ I should prefer to settle the terms with you as to your going at once, if you do not mind, doctor ; it would be a satisfaction to me to know that it is all settled.’

And so, in Mrs. Firmin’s prim little room an agreement was made by which James Ascott bound himself for a given sum to accompany the expedition to the Urganowie under the guidance of Bertram Dalmayne.

CHAPTER III

A SHORT time after the events narrated in the last chapter, the people in Adelaide were surprised at the unusual apparition of a bushman in real up-country costume parading the principal thoroughfare on horse-back. He was a medium-sized, wiry fellow, with a short brown beard, a brick-red face, out of which a pair of merry blue eyes surveyed the crowd good-naturedly. His costume consisted of a cabbage-tree hat, much the worse for wear, and such as was worn in the earlier days of the colony, a flaming red shirt, cord riding-breeches, and top-boots, with a pair of villainous-looking spurs clinking at the heels. The horse he rode was a magnificent animal, apparently as unused to crowds as his rider, for he curvetted, reared, and shied, in a manner calculated to show off to the best advantage his own points and his rider's horsemanship.

'Good Lord, Dalmayne, look at that object!' cried Ascott, grasping his friend's arm as they came out of a shop together.

'Oh, I've seen him before, this morning: that is Mallee Dick, my henchman, the fellow I told you of,

he is going with us, you know, and that is “Conrad” he is riding.’

‘The horse is all right, but what on earth is the man doing in that rig-out? the whole street is agape at him!’

‘He always dresses like that, it is a fad of his, but he is a splendid bushman. See me fetch him here.’ And with that Dalmayne gave a short low whistle, which reached the rider’s ears in spite of the noise of the traffic, for he reined in his horse and cast a quick look around; a moment later he was at the kerbing and looking inquiringly at his master. ‘Want me, sir?’ he asked, in a loud, pleasant voice.

Dalmayne stepped up to him. ‘This is Dr. Ascott, Dick, the gentleman who is going with us to South Africa.’

Dick nodded cheerily to the doctor, and looked him up and down as if appraising him. ‘Hope we’ll have a good time, Doc,’ he said presently.

‘I hope so too,’ said Ascott, with a slight flush, as he noticed a crowd gathering round. ‘You’ve got a fine horse there.’

‘You bet your life!’ cried Mallee Dick. ‘The best nag ever foaled on the Yarracowie; fit to win the Melbourne Cup with a bit of training.’

One of the crowd jeered, and Dalmayne, nodding to his man, stepped back on to the pavement. ‘He is a pugnacious little beggar,’ he explained to Ascott, ‘he would get into a row as likely as not if I had kept him there any longer.’

The doctor nodded, well pleased to see the strange bushman cantering down the street, for he had all an Englishman's dread of publicity, and there were several ladies of his acquaintance in the carriages drawn up in the street. To Dalmayne it made no difference; brought up in the bush, where men learned to regard each other according to their qualities and not their social position, he would not have dreamed of feeling ashamed of chatting with one of the station hands in the street, nor, as he raised his hat gaily to some pretty girls in one of the carriages, did he give a thought as to their approving of his conduct, and had he known that Ascott felt uncomfortable at the incident, would have liked him the less for it.

He had finished off his station business, and was now free to see to his own and Mallee Dick's outfit. Greatly to Ascott's surprise he was taking the horse 'Conrad' with him at his own expense, nor would he be dissuaded even when his father remonstrated with him.

'Whatever happens over there I mean to have a good horse under me,' he said lightly; 'with a good horse, a good gun, *and* Mallee Dick, it will go hard if I don't win through to the Umanowie.'

They were within a day or two of sailing when Ascott received a cablegram from his brother.

'Pomeroy anxious join expedition, wants you come England first, party could equip Natal and proceed Pretoria, Pomeroy you join them via Delagoa.'

And over this there was much discussion. Mrs.

Firmin stoutly opposed the idea as a loss of time, and proposed that Sir George should join the party at Natal if he wished.

‘ But he may have some reason for wishing me to go to England first—he may have later information,’ objected Dalmayne.

‘ He could bring his information with him.’

‘ But he must have some important reason; let us wire and ask.’

But Mrs. Firmin, though consenting to the cablegram being sent, was thoroughly opposed to any delay, and Ascott backed her up warmly.

It was only on the day appointed for leaving Adelaide that the reply message came through—‘ *Most important—come England—last agent returned with news and plans but invalided for life—could not bear journey.*’

With much reluctance Mrs. Firmin agreed to the change of plans, and it was resolved that she, Dr. Ascott, and Mallee Dick with Conrad, should proceed from Cape Town to Natal and thence on to Pretoria, at which place Mallee Dick and the Doctor were to endeavour to pick up the ways of the country and get acclimatised, while Dalmayne was to go on from Cape Town in the mail steamer to Southampton.

As the steamer made its way slowly past the Semaphore, and Dalmayne and his friends were seeing their last, for a time at least, of the Adelaide Hills, a steam-launch ran up alongside with the mails, and Ascott was surprised at getting a bundle of letters sent by hand

from one of his friends in the City. On investigation they turned out to be English mail letters which had been delivered first at the Hospital, and then at his late residence, and had only reached him ultimately owing to his friend's energy and promptness.

FROM DOROTHY ASCOTT TO JAMES ASCOTT, M.D.

' PELHAM HOUSE,
' 21st December 1877.

' MY DEAR OLD JIM,—You don't deserve to get a letter from either Rose or I, for you have been most negligent in your correspondence, but it is nearly Christmas-time, dear, and I *must* send you my love and best wishes. I do wish you were at home again. Jack is very good to us, but we see very little of him now, *he has actually got some business* and puts on such airs! he was down in Somersetshire for a few days but would not tell us anything about why he went. He has got a CLERK! a little mite of a boy—it is so funny to see him! Last week a gentleman named Sir George Pomeroy dined with us, a very grave, stern-looking man, delightfully old-fashioned, but *so* handsome. Jack took him up to his den after dinner, and they never came downstairs till Rose and I had gone to bed! Was not that rude of Jack?

' Of course everything is upside down over Rose's marriage, she and Walter Carrington are everlastingly spooning about, and one never knows where to go, for

wherever one *does* go there are the lovers—and they look so cross when one interrupts them !

‘ I forgot to say it is *Major* Sir George Pomeroy, he lives at a beautiful place called Burton Abbey, so Jack says, and at dinner the other night he invited Rose and I to go and see it “one of these days.” I thought it was rather peculiar to be so indefinite about the date, but when I said so afterwards Jack snapped me up, and said Major Pomeroy was very busy just now. I suppose he is making his will, or something, and has got Jack to do it—these young lawyers *do* make such a fuss over things !

‘ I was much interested in your account of Adelaide, and I only wish you would let me come out and keep house for you now that you are starting for yourself, but Jack says you are sure to marry before long. Are you thinking of it, Jim, dear ? and have you fallen in love yet ? Walter said he expected you would marry some millionaire’s daughter, he says there are lots of them out there only too glad to marry an English gentleman, but I suppose they are really much the same as English girls—are they not ?

‘ Rose says I am to send you her love, and that she will write *soon*, but I do not believe she will ; she never seems to have time for anything, and if she does settle down to something, Walter is sure to come in—that is the worst of marrying an independent man. His father, as you know, always liked Rosie, but since they have been engaged he seems to like her better

than ever, and between Walter and Walter's dad Miss Rose has capital times.

'I know this is a stupid letter, but I did not feel in the humour for writing, and yet I wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas, and tell you how much we all wish you were going to spend it at home.

'Good-night; *do* write a nice long letter, and mind you tell me if you *are* engaged.—Your loving Sister,

'DOROTHY ASCOTT.'

While Mrs. Firmin and her party were speeding past Albany towards Cape Town, John Ascott, a young London solicitor, was closeted with Major Sir George Pomeroy in his chambers in the City.

'I am beginning to doubt,' said John Ascott, 'whether, after all, it was wise to bring this Dalmayne to England. As they said in the cablegram, there is a waste of time, and the information this detective fellow Marron has collected does not really amount to very much. I believe it would have been better had you met the party at Natal.'

Sir George shook his head. 'Dalmayne has Adam Varney's story, and I have Marron's; between the two there may be some missing link—some trifle which Marron has not thought worth while relating—which might mean the saving of much time and trouble. I believe I have acted wisely.'

'You are quite determined to accompany the expedition?'

‘ Undoubtedly I am.’

‘ What should you consider the motive—(it must be a strong one)—which induced this Mrs. Firmin to fit out the party at her own cost ?’

‘ I can’t say ; it has puzzled me. Your brother’s cablegram sheds no light on that part of the affair. She may be some rich philanthropist ; or, possibly, a creature of Varney’s, to whom he has left his money. Judging from the jewels he gave the captain of the *Haidée*, he must (if he had any more of them) have been enormously rich.’

John Ascott leaned back in his chair with a sudden gesture.

‘ What is it ?’ asked his companion.

‘ Suppose the expedition being fitted out has no relation to the lost girls and their father ! Suppose Varney left to this woman the secret of the place from which he obtained the jewels, and that they are simply going in pursuit of wealth !’

Sir George pondered. ‘ It could hardly be that, I think, or they would not have altered their plans to suit me—no ; you may depend upon it that even if they have an ulterior object, the main point in their programme is to find the poor lost girls and their mad father.’

‘ But if Varney confessed to a crime—say he killed the girls and their parent (as you first suggested)—where is the object of their expedition then ?’

‘ God only knows !’ cried the Baronet, with a sigh,

as he rose and paced the room. 'If this goes on much longer, I shall get distracted.'

Ascott eyed him in silence for a moment, then he too rose, and met his client as he turned in his short impatient walk.

'Will you pardon me, Sir George, if I say that your extreme anxiety has made me doubt if I am in possession of all the facts of the case?'

'What do you mean?' cried the elder man, paling visibly.

'When you first did me the honour to consult me, you explained that owing to a disagreement with your family lawyer you were taking outside advice, because you did not wish to be brought in contact with him—is not that so?'

'That is so.'

'I was, quite inadvertently, a witness to your meeting him in the street yesterday, and I could not help noticing how very warmly he greeted you;—your own manner was almost as cordial.'

Sir George looked at his interlocutor angrily, but did not speak.

'I am only a young man, just commencing my profession, but I believe I have a fair amount of brains, and I cannot fail to see that there is something behind all this.'

'And you suspect—what?' asked Sir George.

'I suspect that, for some reason of your own, you have a strong desire *not* to inherit your uncle's property.'

The elder man's face grew paler still, and he paced the room rapidly.

'You are right,' he said at last: 'the day that sees my cousins' deaths proved will be a bitter one for me. It is only lately that I heard of it—a few days before I consulted you—and it has embittered every day of my life since.'

'The information you received bears upon your right to inherit?'

'You have guessed it. . . .' He walked heavily to the small window, and looked out upon the leaden sky. 'How you guessed it, I do not know,' he said, speaking over his shoulder, while a dull red flush mounted steadily in his cheeks—'I am a bastard.'

The bitterness of his tone struck Ascott like a knife, but he could think of nothing to say.

'It was one of those society papers which led to it. A man in the club showed me a paragraph which hinted that "Burton Abbey would soon be inhabited again, but *not* by the gallant Major."

'I took no notice at the time; but another paragraph appeared later, reflecting in a round-about way on my father. And I, instead of going to my solicitor, went to the editor and demanded an apology. He would not satisfy me, and I was about to chastise him, when we were interrupted by a woman. She heard him mention my name, and turned on me like a mad thing; I believe she was intoxicated. She told me that my

father had married her before he married my mother, and that I was a bastard.'

'Did she give any proof?'

'She gave me the date and the name of the church: and I went straight off and verified it. It is only too true. Thank God my poor mother died when she did!'

'And this is why you are so impatient to find out if your cousins are alive?'

'Partly.'

'And partly?'

'Because, if they are dead, I too can find a hiding-place in the wilds of Africa, where my shame may not be known.'

'Don't you think you are taking it wrongly?'

'Wrongly?—man! do you know what it is to have borne an honoured name for five-and-thirty years? to have gloried in it,—to have dreamed dreams of adding to its fame,—to have lived amongst men and women who have told of its ancient glories and its untarnished honour . . . !'

'You mistake me. I meant, that you had taken the matter seriously, without seeing the woman or knowing any more than you have told me. I can only hazard a guess, but I should think twice, if I were you, before I thought shame of *my* father on the words of a brawling, drunken woman.'

'But the Church entries!'

'They may be all right enough, but how do you

know the woman you saw was the woman your father married?’

‘She had her marriage lines, she was bringing them to show the editor.’

‘I wish she had come a bit later, and you had horse-whipped him; it is unprofessional to say so, but I loathe those brutes who spy and prowl, and throw mud anonymously.’

Sir George turned from the window. ‘Do you think there is any chance of her having lied to me?’

‘I should not be surprised; blackmailing is a fine art now. First a few paragraphs in the papers as feelers, then bolder ones, till the victim gets angry or frightened. Then the demand on the editor for his informant, and finally a stiff cheque to hush the matter up.’

‘If I could only think it would end like that!’

‘You would not be so keen on Africa then?’

‘You misjudge me, Ascott. My anxiety for the girls and their father is very keen, this news only deepened it . . . and made me miserable.’

‘Why did you not consult your family lawyer?’

‘I couldn’t bear to, and that’s a fact. . . . I hoped to hide it till I got away, and then leave the wretched woman to do her worst.’

‘That was hardly soldierly, was it?’

‘May be not. I’d sooner face a battalion of the fiercest fighters out, than hear my name bandied about, and hear coarse comments on my mother and father.’

'Well, if you will give me permission to make inquiries, I will do so at once: there is really nothing to do until Dalmayne arrives.'

'And your inquiries will be kept secret? There will be no gossip?'

'Rely on me, Sir George, and don't despair; why, the cases of blackmail are so frequent nowadays, that I wonder it did not occur to you at once that you might be being victimised without cause.'

'I was too miserable to philosophise or reason about it, the thing knocked me all to pieces. Why, man, I I have grown grey,' he said, with a melancholy smile, 'since the last few weeks.'

'Well, you leave it to me, Sir George; I'll let you know directly I have anything worth telling.'

'Couldn't I accompany you?'

'Certainly not! It would only upset you, and do no good.'

'Well then, I will take my leave, but I shall be very, very anxious until I hear from you.'

'Poor beggar!' soliloquised Ascott as he watched Sir George go heavily down the street, 'I hope I shall be able to bring a brighter look into his face before he goes off on this expedition.'

CHAPTER IV

A TALL bronzed young gentleman left the train at Ashford, and, valise in hand, walked briskly down the platform ; before he had well passed the ticket gates, a man in livery stepped up to him, and, touching his hat, asked—

‘For Burton Abbey, sir?’

‘Yes.’

‘Sir George sent me to meet you, sir, he was delayed by some law business, I have the dog-cart waiting.’

The man took the valise, and led the way to where a stylish dog-cart, drawn by a powerful horse, was in waiting, and Dalmayne having taken his seat, they bowled off towards Burton Abbey.

Notwithstanding that his father was an exceptionally wealthy man, and had given him a liberal education, and plenty of pocket-money as a lad, Dalmayne had been somewhat overpowered by the display made by his fellow-passengers from Cape Town, and by the numerous evidences of wealth which he saw on every side on his arrival in England. As he sat in the dog-cart, and his eyes drank in the loveliness of the

English country, his mind was running somewhat uncomfortably on the reason for the feeling of 'being out of it' which he was experiencing. Neither the equipage, nor the horse he was sitting behind, were superior to, or even equal to, his own turn-out in Adelaide, and the man was deferential to an almost exasperating degree, but yet Dalmayne did not feel comfortable. He had lately been, and was still, conscious of a feeling that he was recognised as a 'Colonial,' as one of a different class, that people watched him, and commented on his appearance, and he was beginning to feel anxious and worried.

The seeds of this unenviable frame of mind had been sown by Dr. Ascott's occasional remarks on the Colonials on board the steamer, and never dreaming that Dalmayne had a grain of sensitiveness or diffidence about himself, Ascott had frequently held the 'Australian abroad' up to ridicule.

Dalmayne was so big and strong, and looked so much older than his four-and-twenty years, that Ascott quite forgot that so far as experience of the world went, he was only a boy leaving home for the first time. Had Dalmayne told his friend something of his feelings, he would soon have been reassured, but he let Ascott lash the Colonials with his caustic tongue, and gave no sign that he was taking it to heart, and so he had landed in England a little shy and nervous of himself, and suspicious of the behaviour of those with whom he came in contact. Had he known that many

of the glances which he detected, sent in his direction, simply expressed admiration for his tall, well-knit figure, and bright, open countenance, he might perhaps have gone to the other extreme. As it was, he sat very silently by the coachman and pondered what particular attribute it was which seemed to ‘ give him away ’ at first sight as a Colonial.

The driver broke in on his meditations. ‘ Pretty country hereabouts, sir,’ pointing vaguely with his whip.

‘ You are right, it is a very beautiful bit of scenery.’

‘ Not much like this in Australia, I suppose, sir ? ’

‘ Confound it all ! ’ growled Dalmayne under his breath. ‘ How did you know I came from Australia ? ’ he asked aloud.

‘ Sir George told me, sir, told me you might be a bit strange-like at the station, and I was to look out sharp for you.’

Before he left Australia Dalmayne would have taken this as a compliment, now, with Ascott’s jeers still in his memory, he did not know how to take it, and the driver, after a side glance at his face, made no further attempt at conversation.

Up through a long avenue of beeches, past the lodge gate, into a beautiful park, Bertram Dalmayne saw Burton Abbey in all its splendour. The older portion with ivy covering the whole of the great buttressed walls and reaching far up towards the towers themselves, lay on the left, with the sunshine full upon it.

The newer wings with their rows of stained-glass windows, the great clock-tower and the massive steps leading to the Hall door were right in front.

He had time for a good long view of the splendid building before they reached the steps. As he sprang down, a tall soldierly fellow came out bareheaded to meet him.

'I was extremely vexed at not being able to go to the station for you myself, Mr. Dalmayne,' he said cordially, as they shook hands, 'but I happened to be the only Justice available this morning, and I was obliged to attend at the Court. . . . I hope Mr. Ascott met you at the steamer?'

'Oh yes, thank you, he was awfully good, picked out my train for me and took no end of trouble.'

They stood regarding each other with interested eyes, and in both men's minds the result was favourable. Sir George awoke to his duties with a start. 'I am very remiss,' he said, leading the way, 'luncheon will be ready in a quarter of an hour, I will show you your quarters myself.'

Dalmayne stood in the room allotted to him, and gazed with delighted eyes through the open window.

'What a lovely place!' he ejaculated, 'and, by jove! there are real deer too!'

He leaned against the window and watched the graceful animals with eager eyes, until roused by the sound of a gong.

At lunch he found himself *tête-à-tête* with his host,

and when they had finished and were smoking their cigars in a comfortable little snugery, the Major launched out into his reasons for wishing Dalmayne to come to England.

‘Marron is in the village—he came straight here from South Africa; he is a plucky fellow, and would not cave in until he had told his story, but directly he had told us he collapsed, and has been in bed ever since: the Doctor says he will never leave it alive—the cause? did Ascott not tell you? He got some sort of low fever either in Africa or coming across, and instead of taking care of himself, he just rushed back to tell his news. He kept the crisis back by sheer force of will till he had recounted his adventures, then he lost his reason and had a terrible time. He is sane enough now but pitifully weak, sometimes unable to speak at all.’

‘And his story?’

‘I have written it down, and if you like, will read it to you now. We can stroll down and see Marron afterwards if you are not too tired.’

Dalmayne scouted the idea of fatigue, and sat down close to the old-fashioned window looking out on to the Park, while Sir George got the papers.

‘I have written it down from memory,’ the latter explained as he settled himself in a chair, ‘I daresay it will seem a trifle disjointed.’

He read slowly and carefully a series of memoranda, chiefly of dates, distances travelled, etc., until he came to Marron’s arrival at Eerstelling.

'I learn from a Kafir called Booie (or some such name) that he was at Tati at the time Adam Varney passed through there, and that he remembers Bulanie the native blacksmith, speaking of a mad Englander who stopped the night at Tati Kraal and who wore a gold ring around his neck which he (Bulanie) endeavoured to unfasten. Booie did not see the Englander himself, but he remembers the occasion, for Bulanie in his efforts to loosen the ring or collar in some way roused the temper of the madman, who hurled him to the ground and strode off muttering to himself. He inspanned and trekked almost directly, and Booie has never heard of him since.'

The next note of importance was dated from Tati, and gave a *résumé* of a conversation with Bulanie, who, through an interpreter, gave a vivid description of Varney's appearance and behaviour, which was undoubtedly that of a madman—

"From this man's conversation I gather that Varney had doubtless been shockingly treated: he speaks of his wrists, arms, and throat being covered with festering sores—he was thin and gaunt, and was incessantly muttering to himself."

'I proceed to-morrow with my wagon, interpreter, and six Kafirs to follow up Varney's tracks if possible.'

The rest of the records were short daily notes of distances traversed, until he reached Metse-a-tunya, where he expected to gain some important information from the Kafirs. He ascertained the direction

from which Varney had come, and was informed that in that direction lay bad country and bad men, but on his attempting to start next morning, an Induna came up with a party of warriors and informed him that the king said he must go back at once, 'he was sick of white men.' In spite of threats, bribes, and expostulations, Marron had to obey the king's mandate, and reluctantly turned back. He wrote in his diary: 'However, I have gained something. I know that somewhere, within a month's journey of the Falls, the secret of the disappearance of Captain Clayton and his daughters must be sought for . . . with a party sufficiently numerous to fight our way through the Kafirs if necessary, and well enough supplied with goods for presents or bribes, the difficulties which foiled me this time will disappear. . . . There need be no preliminary searching, . . . the party which comes up can begin their search *after* they leave the Falls . . . that, at least, is something gained.'

The Major put down the note-book, and looked towards Dalmayne eagerly. 'Well, have I given you any information?' he asked.

'Hardly. We knew all you have read, except that Varney had a row with the native blacksmith. I have Mrs. Firmin's story in my valise,—shall I read you that, and make you acquainted with Varney's story?'

'It is what I was going to ask, but while the man is bringing down your valise will you tell me something

of this Mrs. Firmin? What had she to do with Varney? Why is *she* sending an expedition to find *my* relatives?'

'The story will tell you that better than I can.'

'One thing more before you open your valise: Did you ever see Varney?'

'Yes, once, in the Adelaide Hospital, just before he died.'

'What was he like—a tremendously big ruffian?'

'A giant of a man, but if I am any judge of character, no ruffian at all, but a big-hearted, high-spirited fellow, whose troubles unhinged his mind and drove him to drink to gain temporary forgetfulness.'

Sir George looked surprised, but as the servant entered the room at that juncture he made no comment, and, without any preliminaries, Dalmayne read Mrs. Firmin's story through.

As he read on the Baronet grew more and more interested; until the reader drew towards the attempted escape of Varney and Isabel from the caves, he kept his seat quietly, but on the recital of their desperate enterprise, he began to show signs of excitement; when the story was finished, however, he had regained his composure.

'Do you believe it?' he asked curiously.

'I do; don't you?'

'It is a wonderful story, and if it is true I am afraid I have lost valuable time in bringing you here; but we will waste no more than we can help now. There are

no steamers leaving for the Cape until next week—we have four more days, including Sunday, to waste before we can start. I wish to heavens I had met you in Natal, but I had no idea this story of Varney's was so detailed, or that you had plans.'

'Ascott wired "plans."'

'Yes, but I thought he meant "arrangements," I never dreamt of data such as this. I should like Marron to hear this story of Mrs. Firmin's—would you come down and read it to him? I will vouch for his secrecy.'

'I should like to go. I am indeed quite anxious to see the poor fellow.'

Once more the dog-cart was in request, and before long Dalmayne was in the presence of the Detective Agent. There was a nurse in charge of the sick man, but in obedience to her patient's imperious gesture, she left him with his visitors. Marron looked scrutinisingly at the young Australian, and then whispered to Sir George, to know what news he had brought. Sitting very near the bed, and reading in a low voice, Dalmayne again read the story of Nurse Firmin.

Marron lay with his eyes closed for the most part, but opened them now and then when the reader halted.

'What do you think of it?' Sir George asked, when Dalmayne had finished.

'Quite possible it is true,' the dying man whispered, 'It is a rum country . . . I wish . . . I wish I could go out with you, Sir George . . .'

'So do I, Marron, very much; but I will tell you all about it when I come back—if I ever do.'

'I shall be seeing stranger things by that time, sir,' he gasped—'if all they say is true, I shall know all about it before you do.'

There was a slight pause, then the sick man beckoned Dalmayne to come closer. 'Be well armed, take a man or two who has had experience with Kafirs; it will save you much trouble and annoyance; and good-bye.'

He held out a thin, scraggy hand to each of them as they bade him good-bye; and, almost before they left the room, had sunk back into the stupor from which they had aroused him.

Sir George and his guest, instead of going back to the Abbey direct, extended their drive for several miles, while they discussed the subject which was engrossing the thoughts of both.

On their return they found John Ascott waiting impatiently, and learned from him that Dr. Ascott had written from Pietermaritzburg that they were all well, and just leaving for Pretoria.

Sir George glanced sharply at him, and something in his expression gave him a suspicion that he had something else to communicate.

'You will like to go up to your room, Mr. Dalmayne?' he said; 'you know at what hour we dine?'

When Dalmayne was gone, Ascott looked at his client and smiled. 'You are not much of a diplomatist, Sir George, to give such a point-blank hint.'

'Your news, Ascott. You have some, I am sure—never mind Dalmayne, he is too good a fellow to be touchy; tell me, have you discovered anything?'

'I have discovered everything. It is as I suspected—a barefaced attempt at blackmailing. . . . Your father's servant married her in his master's name. . . . It was a long story. The servant was masquerading in his master's name, and the girl—a designing hussy—thinking she had a prize, drew him on until he promised to marry her. Whether he was afraid to divulge his real position or not I don't know, but while your father was in Italy the two lived in Burnstone as Sir George and Lady Pomeroy—when his master came back the bubble burst and they parted . . . the woman will not bother you any more.' Sir George put out his hand. 'If you knew what a relief it is to me to hear you say that, Ascott! I believe I have aged ten years since it happened.'

'Well, it is all over now, thank goodness; how do you like your guest?'

'Dalmayne! Oh, he is a capital fellow . . . the very man for this expedition . . . he is a bit anxious to be off, though, and we have four days to get through before starting . . . we both have our outfits ready, so there is no chance of killing time that way.'

'Suppose you come down to my place to-morrow, my aunt and sisters would be glad to see you, and I daresay you feel more like yourself now than you did when you came to see me.'

' Was I very distrait ? '

' Well, no ; but you were pre-occupied, and appeared as if you had a world of care on your shoulders. I put it all down to anxiety about your cousins. '

' Suppose I send a note to your aunt and sisters, and ask them to lunch here to-morrow, and spend the afternoon in exploring the Abbey. Do you think they would be offended at the short notice ? I might say I am leaving England on Tuesday, you know. '

' They would like it immensely. '

' And you will stay overnight, I hope ? '

' Delighted to . . . I want to see more of Dalmayne. '

' I think he is a capital fellow so far—modest and yet independent—he has pleasant ways too. '

On the following day the Abbey was gayer than it had been for some time ; Sir George, relieved of his fears, seemed a different man, and was the life and soul of the party. Old Mrs. James, Ascott's aunt, accompanied by her nieces, were met by the Baronet at the station, and he had thoroughly put them at ease long before they reached Burton Abbey.

' I say, Dorothy, old girl, I believe you 've made a conquest, ' whispered Jack, as they wandered through the Abbey . . . ' he is quite smitten. '

Dorothy raised her eyes, and surveyed her brother with a withering look. ' Don't talk nonsense, ' she said shortly.

' It's not nonsense, he has never taken his eyes off you. '

‘Don’t be silly, Jack, he’s only a boy.’

‘*A boy!* the noble baronet *a boy!*—Oh! I see, my lady, it’s the Australian you’ve got your eye on!’

Dorothy Ascott flushed and looked annoyed. ‘You are very rude, Jack, let us go on and join the others.’

‘Not but what the Australian isn’t a very desirable party also,’ Jack soliloquised aloud; ‘upon my word, my sisters are extraordinary lucky girls—one is to marry Walter Carrington with six thousand a year, and the other is hesitating between the young owner of Burton Abbey and the still younger Australian Shepherd King.’

‘Poor old Dolly, it’s too bad to tease her,’ he muttered to himself as he saw his sister’s eyes glisten; ‘I never saw such a soft-hearted girl, I always do seem to rub her up the wrong way somehow.’

They had a very pleasant ramble through the old buildings, and after dinner when the men had come up for coffee they all walked up into the picture-gallery to see the portraits of Captain Clayton, his wife, and the two girls.

A little later, how it happened no one quite knew, they were lounging in the great bay-windows of the library, with the lights burning low; and somewhere from out of the darkness the Australian was telling in a clear, pleasant manner, anecdotes and stories of Australian bush-life.

There was a rare charm in the quaint old-fashioned room with only the deep glow of the fire at the far

end, and the dim light from down-turned lamps to relieve it from absolute darkness.

They sat very still and quiet, and something in the quietness brought to the speaker's mind the memory of the far-off land with its solemn gums, the rustling shea-oaks, the still depths of the reed-fringed lagoons, and the fragrance of the wattle bloom; and as they mirrored themselves in his mind his voice took a deeper, softer tone, and forgetful of the newness of his acquaintance with them, of his previous fears and shyness, he spoke out of a full heart in praise of the country he loved.

They saw in turn the lonely shepherd and his flocks, the boundary rider, the dry parched plains, the flooded creeks, the bush fires, the bushman lost in the trackless scrub, the shearing-shed with its noisy inmates, the drafting yards, the mustering and branding, and many other scenes, till suddenly the narrator stopped short, aghast at his own garrulity, and apologised for being so talkative.

'I could listen for *hours*,' declared Dorothy Ascott earnestly.

'As for me, I have a good mind to make Walter take me to Australia at once,' said Rose.

Sir George turned up the lamps, and Ascott looking at his watch declared it was time for his party to be off.

'I hope you will enjoy your trip to Africa, Mr. Dalmayne. Goodbye,' said Dorothy Ascott as she bade him good-night at the carriage door.

And Dalmayne went to sleep, to dream of traversing Africa to find a girl who, with her fair hair muffled in a soft white cloud, looked out at him in the silvery moonlight and said ‘ Good-bye.’

CHAPTER V

THE mail-cart drawn by a team of mules clattered noisily over the hill-top, and the sable driver slightly turning his head and pointing with his whip cried—

‘Pretoria, Baas!’

‘Thank goodness for that!’ growled Sir George Pomeroy, scanning the tiny little town lying at the foot of the hill, ‘we have had about enough of mail-carts, eh, Dalmayne?’

‘It’s a bit crampy, but we’ve covered the ground well; far faster than we could have done on horseback. Hullo!’ he shouted, half rising in his seat as a horseman swept out from behind the Fort and cantered towards them, ‘here’s my man, Mallee Dick! look at that horse, Sir George—that’s Conrad, by Thundercloud out of Bronzewing—isn’t he a clipper?’

Mallee Dick, still clad in his favourite costume, rode as close as he dared, and nodded to his master in a hearty manner.

‘Disrespectful beggar!’ muttered Sir George to himself as he scanned the new-comer curiously.

‘All well, Dick?’ shouted Dalmayne, leaning out to get a good look at his horse.

‘Doc and me are, the female’s been on the wallaby so much she’s a bit dicky.’

Dalmayne drew back to hide a smile.

‘What on earth did he mean?’ asked Sir George.

‘Mrs. Firmin has been running about too much and made herself ill, I expect. . . . I shall have to lecture Mallee Dick presently on his impudence in calling her the female, though.’

‘You don’t look much like lecturing him,’ said Sir George, regarding his companion’s face good-humouredly.

‘Don’t I? I suppose I am a bit of an ass, but the sight of that fellow and my old horse is like a bit of home to me. I can almost smell the wattle bloom with Mallee Dick and Conrad in view.’

‘Are all Australians as patriotic as you, I wonder? you are the most homesick fellow I ever saw, the very mention of Australia is enough to bring a softer note into your voice and a softer look into your eyes.’

‘Oh! I daresay I am an ass—in fact, I know I am; not that I am [ashamed of it, you know,’ he added ingenuously.

Sir George was silent—in his own heart he was wondering how this young fellow, who was in some respects exceptionally smart and practical, could be at the same time so unsophisticated and almost boyish. ‘I believe he would kiss that horse if he got the chance,’ he thought to himself. And in point of

fact that is just what Dalmayne did do the very first time he got Conrad all to himself.

With a sweep and rush and a volley of whip-cracks the driver rounded the turn and drew up in Church Square and the travellers descended.

A bearded man in a loose flannel shirt and wearing a wide felt hat stepped up to Dalmayne—'Glad to see you,' he said cheerily.

'Great Scott! I didn't know you, Ascott. Sir George—Dr. Ascott.' As they shook hands Mrs. Firmin glided up, and, after a few words with Dalmayne, was also presented to Sir George. 'I could not wait at the Hotel,' she explained, 'Dr. Ascott wished me to do so, but I could not—so much time has already been wasted.'

'I am to blame for that, Mrs. Firmin,' Sir George said with a little bow; 'I have blamed myself for it ever since, but there shall be no further delay. I will see to that.'

She looked at him curiously, and appeared about to speak, but changed her mind.

'Are these all your traps?' asked Ascott, glancing round; 'Here, Gobaal! Kleinboy! *woza lapa leta lo boxi checha.*' Some of the little crowd of onlookers laughed aloud as the two coloured boys picked up the luggage and carried it off.

'Why! you're quite a dab at the lingo, Ascott,' cried Dalmayne admiringly.

The doctor looked complacent; 'I'm not so bad,' he

said, 'but to tell you the truth I don't know what they call portmanteaus. *I made up* "boxi" on the spur of the moment—they understood it too, they're 'cute fellows.'

After 'tiffin,' a word which Ascott used with great unction, they all reassembled in a small sitting-room in order that their plans might be discussed; almost directly Ascott closed the door Mrs. Firmin spoke.

'I want to set one thing right,' she said, looking straight at Sir George; 'you spoke just now of seeing that no delay occurred,—did that mean that you were under the impression that you were to lead the expedition?'

The others looked at each other uncomfortably at this plain speaking, and Sir George flushed.

'Perhaps I took too much on myself,' he said, good-naturedly, 'but I certainly have expected to take the command.'

'When I arranged this expedition—knowing nothing of you or your connection with Captain Clayton—I gave the command to Mr. Dalmayne, and any expedition sent out by me will be under *his* command; I wish that to be thoroughly understood.'

'I have no objection to serving under Sir George Pomeroy,' protested Dalmayne eagerly; 'in fact, I should be very glad to; he has seen service in Griqualand, is used to commanding men, and has a nearer interest in the search than any of us.'

Mrs. Firmin bit her lip. 'You speak as if you meant

it, but I have myself to consider. Sir George Pomeroy might object to my going if he is in command.'

'You!' they all cried, turning towards her.

'Yes, me. I intended to go all through, but it was hardly worth while speaking of my desire until we were fairly embarked on our overland journey. What do you say, Sir George?'

The Baronet looked glum. 'Er—I should say no—most decidedly you would only be an incumbrance—and could do no good—you could not put up with hardships as we men can—and,—and the thing is altogether preposterous.'

'Then I withdraw from the affair at once, and with Mr. Dalmayne and Dr. Ascott will formulate a scheme at once—we need not detain you.'

Sir George, looking hurt and angry, rose from his chair. 'You will understand, madam, that I had no wish to hurt your feelings, but said what I honestly thought. As a soldier I have always found the presence of er—ladies—a great hindrance in campaigning.'

'And,' said Dalmayne, 'I think Sir George is right. I don't want to go back on you, Mrs. Firmin, but you ought to have told us before. I never dreamt of your accompanying us farther than Pretoria.'

'Does that mean that you will break your engagement?'

'No. I will keep my agreement; but I think you have made a mistake.'

'And you?' she said, turning to Dr. Ascott.

'And I, nurse, I who know you better than either of

them, I who used to smile at your infatuation, but have learned to believe in your story now—I say that it is *they* who have made a mistake; that there will not be a man in the expedition who will stand the hardships and privations more uncomplainingly and bravely than you will. And to you, Dalmayne, I say “Take her,” she will be worth her weight in gold to you before you have done with her.’

She gave him a grateful smile and looked towards the others.

Sir George was the first to speak. ‘It is of no use splitting up the party, Mrs. Firmin. If you are decided, I am content; it is wasting time to argue about it.’

‘You will command the party with Mr. Dalmayne as second in charge, and you will take me?’ she said.

‘Yes; since you are determined to go.’

The assent was not over gracious, but it satisfied Mrs. Firmin, and they proceeded at once to discuss their plans; for a while Mrs. Firmin took but little share in the talking, but when she did her suggestions were eminently practical, and Sir George began to look upon her more favourably.

Ascott had already provisionally enrolled twenty-five smart young fellows, and while the consultation was being held Mallee Dick had been despatched to bring them up for inspection.

They arrived in twos and threes, and hung about the hotel until Mallee Dick appeared with the last man,

and then forming into line in the veranda of their own accord, they stood patiently awaiting inspection.

Sir George started a little when he saw them, and with a sharp 'Attention, men,' inspected them with a feeling of satisfaction.

'You've seen service, men? You've been drilled at least, I can see that,' he said, halting in front of them.

A soldierly young fellow saluted. 'We are all "Black Horse" men, sir; most of us served in Griqualand when you were there with the ——th.'

'Eh? what? I remember you. Cawley, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Rank?'

'Got my stripes, sir.'

'How is it you did not enrol for this campaign they are talking of against Secocoeni?'

'Heard of this affair of yours, sir.'

'And thought it was going to be better fun?'

'Better pay, sir!'

'Oh!' He turned to Ascott: 'Have you arranged to pay them any fixed sum, then?'

'Twenty pounds a month and find their own horses, or twelve ten and have horses provided.'

Sir George smiled. 'I need not ask which they chose,' he said grimly. 'Mrs. Firmin and I will have a nice sum to pay before the thing is out.'

'She told me to pay well and get good men.'

'Well, it seems you've done both. What do you say, Dalmayne? They are a fit-looking lot, eh?'

Having arranged with the men to meet them an hour later with their horses for inspection, Sir George dismissed them; and the three men, with Mallee Dick in attendance, walked to the outskirts of the village where the two trek-wagons and their teams were outspanned.

Sir George was greatly pleased with the outfit; the wagons were strong and serviceable, the provisions abundant and well packed, and nothing seemed to have been omitted. The mules were fine strong-looking animals, and their drivers, a couple of Hottentots, were intelligent and experienced men. Sir George was rather taken aback when Ascott informed him that the greater part of the work had been done by Mrs. Firmin. From the wagons they returned to the hotel, and Dalmayne at last had a chance of mounting Conrad while his companions had a couple of stout horses which Ascott had purchased under Mallee Dick's supervision.

'You can't have your rifles for a few hours after we start, men,' Sir George explained, after he had thoroughly inspected the horses. 'The Dutch Government will raise Cain if they see twenty-five of you mounted and armed. You must be here at five o'clock to-morrow morning with your horses and kits.'

By the time tea was over and the luggage had been carried down to the wagons, a second council was held as to the best plan of meeting the band of Amaswazies whom Ascott had commissioned a Dutch-

man to raise for service. They were camped some distance from Pretoria, lest the authorities of the Dutch Republic should scent their presence; and finally it was resolved that Cawley and Dalmayne should strike out eastward in the morning and bring the band on by a circuitous route while Sir George and the rest of the party went on with the wagons.

Two days later in a little valley Sir George and his party lay encamped. They were well out of the beaten ways, and the wagons had had some rough usage, but the party were well and in good spirits.

The white tent-wagons with their long chains and yokes stretched out before them like great snakes, were drawn up close to the waterhole; on the slopes the troopers were bivouacked, and here and there the camp-fires flared up in readiness for the evening meal.

By one wagon Mrs. Firmin sat engrossed in the chart drawn by Adam Varney. She looked up as Sir George approached her.

'Here they come!' he said.

Over the crest of the low hill to the south the Swazies swept like a small black cloud, a momentary halt as their Induna caught sight of the camp, a slight wheel and down they came, their assegais glittering in the beams of the sinking sun, their tall plumes and feathered headgear vibrating and swaying to their springing steps, and their dark eyes roving fiercely here and there.

Every man wore a leopard skin loosely flung across

the shoulders, and white plumes and anklets upon their arms.

As they marched in, a small compact body, four abreast, and the thud-thud of their footsteps mingled with their low hoarse chant, it was impossible to withhold a feeling of admiration for them; their free untrammelled motions, their warlike mien roused a feeling of delight in Sir George's breast.

‘They are magnificent fellows!’ he said warmly, turning to Mrs. Firmin. ‘What a sight an “impi” would be!’

As they trampled past with their Induna in front, Dalmayne and Cawley galloped over the ridge and reined up at the wagons.

Cawley flung himself off his horse, and without taking any notice of the others, shouted angrily to the Induna who halted his men, and after a few hot words in the Amaswazie dialect had passed between them, Cawley came back and saluted his leader.

‘What was the matter?’ asked Sir George, looking from Cawley to Dalmayne.

The latter laughed. ‘They rather took it out of us. We were on horseback, and they on foot, and they took a short cut, and got here first, though Cawley and I galloped over every bit of level ground. They are regular fiends to travel. I hope they will prove fiends to fight.’

‘Don't fear for that, sir,’ said Cawley respectfully; ‘they're a bit aggravating now and then, confound

them; but they're the best fighting men in South Africa, and Matatyowie—that's the Induna—is the bloodthirstiest old beggar of the whole tribe—that's his name, Matatyowie, *the blood-drinker*.'

The Induna came up as he spoke, and greeted the white men courteously, but by no means deferentially, in his own tongue.

'He says he wants to know which is the chief?' explained Cawley as he pointed towards Sir George.

'Pomenoi?' the Induna repeated slowly, then glancing at Sir George's soldierly figure with a shade more of deference, he faced round on Cawley with an inquiring look.

'He wants to know if the "white woman" is going too, sir?' Cawley explained again.

'Tell him to go to the devil and mind his own business.'

Whether Cawley interpreted the reply correctly, they did not know; but with a slight shrug in Mrs. Firmin's direction, he went back to his men, and Cawley and Sir George went to the troopers' bivouac in order that Sir George might formally place him in charge as sergeant.

That night, over the camp-fire, the first sign of a disturbance took place. Mallee Dick, who during his master's absence had messed with the troopers and taken his share of the work willingly enough, desired now that Dalmayne had returned, to return to his position as body-servant. Dalmayne was quite content

to do without him, for Mrs. Firmin and the Hottentots had done all the cooking for the ‘ Captain’s mess,’ as they called it, in utter disregard to Sir George’s claim to a majority, and the Hottentots were always handy for any little service.

Sir George had no objection; but Dalmayne, seeing that the leader had no special servant, felt that it would be equivalent to owning to his own incapacity if he gave way, and stoutly objected to Mallee Dick’s ministrations.

‘ You know, Dick, you’ve got to do what you’re told—Cawley is the sergeant, and you’ve got to obey him.’

‘ That be d——d for a yarn,’ cried Mallee Dick angrily.

The insolence was too much for Dalmayne, and in another minute he would have knocked his henchman down, had not Sir George interfered. ‘ Go to your quarters, sir, and report yourself to Sergeant Cawley,’ he thundered, addressing the bushman.

‘ And who the h—— are you talking to?’ demanded Mallee Dick, beginning to dance, while his hands clenched angrily at his sides.

A sharp whistle brought Cawley and a couple of men on the scene, and Dalmayne’s first night in the camp was spoiled by visions of Mallee Dick as he had seen him last, bloody, torn, and disfigured with rage, being hauled off by the two strapping troopers, whom he cursed in such a fluent and impressive manner as

fairly staggered them, accustomed as they were to rough language.

'He must go back to Pretoria,' said Sir George decidedly. 'I won't have a man like that in this expedition: he'll neither obey orders nor be respectful. I am sorry for you, Dalmayne, because I know you are attached to him; but he must go.'

Dalmayne nodded. 'I am afraid you are right, Sir George.'

And so at daybreak next morning as the Amaswazies and troopers escorted the wagons away over the ridges to the northward, Mallee Dick, mounted on the worst of the troop horses, sat sullenly in the saddle near the deserted camp, and watched them disappearing. He watched till no sign of them was visible, and then standing up in his stirrups, gave vent to a burst of strong language, during which he damned every member of the party except his master, not even omitting 'the female' and the 'pill-maker,' as he irreverently termed Mrs. Firmin and the Doctor.

Having relieved his mind sufficiently, he lit his pipe, and, still sitting on his patient horse, began to smoke. Presently a smile stole round the corners of his mouth, the angry blue eyes brightened, and he regained his usual good-natured look. 'I'm a blooming idiot, that's what I am,' he muttered, and then smiled again as if the thought rather amused him. 'Come up! you hog-maned old billygoat!' he shouted, suddenly rousing his horse. 'We've got the sack, that's what we've

got,’ and then, suddenly changing his mind, he slipped out of the saddle, and freeing the horse from its burden, knee-haltered him, and let him go, while he himself sat on a half-charred log, and solemnly smoked his pipe.

CHAPTER VI

EXTRACTED from the Diary of Dr. James Ascott.

18th September 1878.—We arrived this evening at the village of the chief Sepidilli—the Kafir chief from whom the detectives learnt that Adam Varney had been here, and travelled westward. Sepidilli is, it appears, friendly to the British cause in the war now declared against Secocoeni, and has made us welcome through his Indunas. We have not seen the chief himself yet, but the Indunas informed us, through Cawley (who, by the way, is almost indispensable to us), that he would grant Sir George an interview in the morning, and as a mark of honour Sir George and I have been allotted a hut to sleep in, inside the Kraal or compound. I could not well refuse to accompany Sir George, but I must say, I should feel a great deal safer and more comfortable in our own camp.

The hut we are occupying is a 'guest hut,' and we had to enter on our hands and knees. As I crept through I could not help reflecting how easy it would be for one of our sable friends to knock me on the head. Luckily they did not do so, but it was an unpleasant feeling.

The hut is fairly large, and prettily decorated with a diamond-shaped pattern, coloured with red, yellow, and blue pigments; the roof is of thatch, and the floor hard and dry. We have stuck some candles in bottles on the floor, and as I sit writing by the light of one of them, and hear the musical voices of our entertainers, the bleating of their goats, and lowing of their cattle, and catch now and then a brief glance of a round smiling black face peering in at the 'Umlungu,' I begin to feel that at last we have really entered in earnest on our search. I look at Pomeroy's bronzed and somewhat stern face, and wonder if, as he lies placidly on his rugs watching the thin blue wreaths of smoke curling above his head and whirling slowly out of sight, I wonder if he, too, feels the change as I do; and if he begins to believe (as I believe more and more each day) that there is greater truth in Adam Varney's strange story than we once thought possible. Nothing has happened except the usual incidents of the daily trek. We passed an old deserted Fort yesterday—Fort Oliphant—and in the early morning left the Oliphant river and came on here; nothing has been told us by the Indians, and yet I feel so different to-night. The vagueness and mystery of this Africa has set its seal upon me, and without knowing why, I seem to feel that nothing can be too strange for this land which is itself so strange.

I like to watch Pomeroy as he lies quite motionless on his rug just opposite me; he is such a stern reserved

man, his clear grey eyes seem to see everything, and yet he seldom gives one the idea that he does see anything at the time. It is only afterwards, if one is puzzled, that he opens his memory box and shows how observant he is. Dalmayne speaks of him as having been 'very jolly' on the voyage—he is not that now; not that he is surly or cross, but he is so extremely silent and quiet, I never saw a man so little given to fidgeting or moving about as he is. He is lying now as he lay nearly half an hour ago, perfectly still, his eyes fixed on the tiny bit of sky visible through the door, and not once has he stroked his moustache, changed his position, or stretched himself as most men would have done half a dozen times. Dalmayne, who takes more liberties with him than any one, told him a night or two ago that he wished a bulldog ant would nip him, just to see if he would take the trouble to move.

19th.—I was up at daylight, and made a tour of the Kraal, it is surrounded on all sides by a high bamboo fence, and inside the enclosure the huts are built in all directions. The king's hut has an awful set of trophies in the shape of skulls hung round the roof; near the eaves, and on the summit grins another, that of 'Matabaan,' the great chief from the Nor'-West, whom Sepidilli defeated in single combat nearly twenty years ago.

I accompanied Sir George at the interview, and was thoroughly taken aback at the king's appearance. He

may once have been a fine warrior and an object of dread and fear, but he is now a harmless and disgusting old fellow suffering from creeping paralysis. Cawley translated the speeches on both sides; it really amounted to very little, Sepidilli asked for presents, gave his permission to travel through his country, and confirmed what we had already heard about Varney. Cawley says he is sure that no harm came to Varney in this Kraal, and thinks there is no doubt but that he travelled west from here, as stated. After the 'Vidaba' or talk was over, Sir George and I bade the king goodbye and left the Kraal; an hour later we had inspanned and trekked, and are now within a few miles of Eerstelling.

In another day we shall be in one of the most northern towns of the Transvaal—Eerstelling—we are all wild to see it.

20th.—*Eerstelling!* We are camped on a little hillock just by Captain Clayton's house. Sir George took matters into his own hands and had the door broken open. . . . He went in first, and we all crowded behind, Dalmayne, Mrs. Firmin, and myself, while Cawley and three or four troopers remained outside, in case the residents made themselves unpleasant.

My head swam as, by degrees, I took in the various objects in the room. On a little table near me was a basket with a ball of white wool, a pair of scissors, and two or three small feminine trifles. On the walls were several spirited cartoons, signed 'K' in a girl's hand.

We all knew it must be Katie Clayton. One of the drawings, undoubtedly, depicted Adam Varney driving a team of bullocks. His size is exaggerated, and the bullocks are so small as to seem like sheep except for their branching horns. None of the sketches bore any explanatory passages.

There were several boxes and trunks in this room, a large table and some chairs, including two or three 'hammock' chairs. The clock had stopped at twenty-five minutes to seven, and stuck in between it and the wall, was an envelope addressed to 'Captain Clayton.' Dalmayne and I remained here, while Sir George and Mrs. Firmin went on to the other rooms in search of the girls' chamber. . . . I knew they were going for some specific object, but not what it was, and I did not ask.

Very soon the visit was over, the door nailed up, and we walked past the deserted smelting-house and the blacksmith's shop and on to camp. It is a sad little place this, the people seem listless and phlegmatic, and took little interest in us; the tall chimney of the deserted smelting-house looks out of place in this sleepy hollow. At the old Smithy we loitered a few minutes, but there was nothing to see but the rude forge, and the ashes of long dead fires. A depressing place truly, and I was glad when we inspanned and left it.

Cawley tells me that one of the troopers who was once mining up here, is confident that the place will

some day be a great mining centre. I cannot believe it, I cannot imagine that this sleepy hollow will ever ring to the sound of pick and shovel, or that from the tall lonely chimney there will ever again issue wreaths of smoke, or that the quiet slopes will be crowded by busy workers . . . it seems a place forgotten.

25th September 1878.—We are heading for Tati in the Makalaka country, the marches are slow and tedious, and some of the men are grumbling, Dalmayne alone remains in high spirits. Sir George, quiet and observant, keeps much to himself; Mrs. Firmin rides inside the tent-wagon during the marches, and seldom stirs even if they get stuck, and the loading has to come off. A sort of hush seems to have come over us all, Dalmayne’s cheerful face seems out of place, I don’t know why, but it is not in keeping with our surroundings.

Game is fairly plentiful, and we live well. The Hottentots are capital cooks, and the country is not bad, still there is a mysterious saddening influence over us all, and I find myself growing morbid and unreasonably irritated at the Australian’s insouciance. . . . I wish we could travel faster, this slow travelling is maddening.

6th November 1878.—For the first time for several weeks I open my diary. We are now on the Makalaka side of the Limpopo or Crocodile River, or as the Kafirs call it, the “Oorie.” We have been vexatiously

delayed by several causes, and I have had no inclination to write: crossing the Hout River the Amaswazies fell foul of some of the local tribe, and in spite of Matatyowie and Cawley's endeavours to avert bloodshed, three of the king's men and one of our Swazies were killed. Sir George had the greatest difficulty in pacifying the king, and at one time it looked as if we should have to fight our way through. However, owing to Cawley's tact and a lavish present, we eventually pacified the king. In the very thick of the disturbance, and when Bert Dalmayne had drawn up the troopers ready for action, Mallee Dick came riding through the brushwood, and, without speaking, took up a position amongst the troopers . . . there was no time for explanations then, and I think we were all glad to see the quaint figure amongst us. When the row was over, Sir George sent for him and elicited that he had been following our tracks ever since he was dismissed; I have more than a suspicion that he had a confederate or two among the troopers, but he stoutly denied it. The poor fellow had meant to 'lie low,' as he phrased it, for some time longer, but seeing Dalmayne in danger he came to share it: Sir George gave him a good lecturing, but he is to be allowed to return—and I am very glad of it. He is thinner and browner than ever, and his horse is a sorry animal, but Mallee Dick, like his master, still seems in good spirits—the loneliness of the bush is no new thing to either of them.

I have asked Mrs. Firmin to show me Adam Varney's plan of the country, to see whereabouts we are.

The definiteness of it fills me with enthusiasm at one moment, but depresses me the next. It seems impossible that Captain and Katie Clayton can still be alive. . . . They have grown real personages to me. In my own mind I think of her as "Katie"—oh! if we were only at our journey's end and could resolve these doubts.

16th November 1878.—Tati. To my surprise there are several European buildings here and a white man, James Wood, an ivory merchant, is living under the king's protection. . . . I believe the houses are the king's property, but we have no time for inquiries, the Amaswazies, sick of the perpetual travelling, are mad for fighting, and we are to trek directly Lo Bengulo will send permission; the Matabele on their side are just as anxious to wipe out our little band of sable allies, and it will almost be a miracle if we get through without a disturbance. Of course the 'Swazies' would have no chance against the thousands of Matabele, but they show no fear . . . Wood says it is simply ridiculous to attempt to reach the Victoria Falls with Matatyowie's men.

20th November 1878.—We left Tati only yesterday, owing to the king demurring to our passage through his country—last night we crossed the Ashangena and made good progress.

27th November 1878.—Kambusa. A Makalaka village. . . .

28th November 1878.—Passed Kasheme, Bosi Mapani, and several small villages . . . got some fine melons at Bosi Mapani.

2nd December 1878.—Crossed the Mai-tengue River on the 30th, and travelled over beautiful country, in which the Morula trees were numerous—from the pulp of this fruit the Matabele make their 'beer,' a very good drink.

Yesterday an Induna dropped down on us with a large band of Matabele, and asked what we were doing here. . . . Cawley eventually satisfied him that we had the king's permission to travel. . . . The Induna was very hard to shake off, and both he and his men seemed to find it hard to refrain from tackling the 'Swazies,' who regarded them with haughty disdain. I do not think Matatyowie's men know what fear is.

From the Mai-tengue we trekked on through a Mapanani forest.

10th December 1878.—Yesterday we crossed the Libanani, and the troopers had some splendid hunting and fishing, as Sir George called a halt to attend to one of the wagons. The pools were literally crammed with fish, and the amount of game was astonishing. We heard elephants trumpeting, and lions roaring—the woods teemed with wild animals. Near the water wild-flowers grew in profusion, and beautiful birds

flitted from tree to tree—one of the men shot a silver jackal and gave the skin to Dalmayne.

This place is a perfect wonderland for beauty, but the cobras were too plentiful for my taste.

What a strange place Africa is! So sad and lonely in some places, so full of life and activity in others, and in all so mystical.

Mrs. Firmin was greatly annoyed at the necessity for halting, and personally watched the off-loading of the wagon for some time, but a cobra—a dead one at that—was too much for her, and she took refuge in her own wagon again, much to the relief of the troopers, who are ludicrously afraid of her.

26th December 1878.—After leaving Libanani, we reached Yorush Pools on the 20th, passing Klamaklenyana Springs, and making good headway—from Yorush we pushed on to Tamasetze through the Madenassana's country. This tribe is subject to the Bamangwatos, and are an ugly-looking lot—the country passed through hereabouts was covered with acacia, mimosa, and fan-palms.

On the 24th we reached Henry's Pool, where we camped over Christmas day, the mules being fairly tired out. The indefatigable Dalmayne, with Mallee Dick in attendance, set off hunting in the morning, and shot a beautiful sword-antelope, which with some Koodoo flesh, and a capital plum-pudding which Mrs. Firmin made, comprised our Christmas cheer—and very good it was too.

In the evening Mrs. Firmin asked us to her wagon, and we found it very snug and cheery, though Dalmayne, Sir George, and I filled it rather tightly—round the tent-wagon in a half-circle the troopers were standing about, evidently in anticipation of some fun.

Mrs. Firmin having got us fairly into the wagon started the 'Old Hundredth,' and though we were rather taken aback at first, most of us joined in, and it sounded very well. Dalmayne has a capital voice, and sang with all his heart; when the hymn was over Mrs. Firmin read the lessons for the day, and bade us good-night. We all went to bed very quietly, and I think we all felt rather better men. One of the troopers, a great swashbuckling villain, confided to Cawley that 'it was a dashed fine song,' and hummed the air for some time afterwards.

To-day we left Henry's Pool or Pan, and I am writing this just as we inspan for the afternoon trek.

31st December 1878.—Reached Deykah (a small river running into the Zambesi) on the 29th, and this morning reached Panda-ma-Tenka, an old trading station in the Marotse district. Here the lions are very numerous.

26th January 1879.—No heart to write; we have passed through a sea of troubles. After leaving Panda-ma-Tenka we changed our route, and travelled nor'-nor'-west, and then north-easterly towards Gashuma, passing elephants, giraffes, zebras, buffaloes, hartebeeste,

reitboks, orkebis, and other game in great numbers, the sight of which was tantalising in the extreme to those of the party who are hunters, and they all seemed to be that way inclined.

Our first trouble, in passing through this country, began with the sickness of Conrad, Dalmayne's Australian horse; he was bitten by a Tsetse-fly, and we were powerless to prevent his death. Bert and Mallee Dick stood by and watched the poor brute until the end came, and then Dalmayne, very grave and silent, resumed his duty of off-loading a wagon which had, as usual, got stuck in the sand; but Mallee Dick gave vent to his despair and wrath in such a paroxysm of oaths and denunciation on the country, the flies, and everything South African, that I was afraid Sir George would hear him and punish him. Dalmayne took him in hand, however, and he quieted down, but Conrad's death has quite upset the poor fellow, who was inordinately proud of the animal.

This death, however, was only the prelude. Since then we have lost several horses and slaughter oxen, but none of the mules have died so far.

Pushing on with the utmost speed, we passed through some terribly rough country to the Malopa valley, and here we first heard the thunder of the Victoria Falls. It was not long before we were all gazing on that wonderful sight. From the top of the rocks the waters of the Zambesi hurled themselves sheer over the cliffs into the abyss, nearly 450 feet be-

low; and, as they smote the base, sent up great jets and wreaths of spray and foam, that glittered and sparkled in the beams of the sun.

The country about the falls is covered with sycamores and mimosa, ferns, palm bushes, and magnificent creepers; and, altogether, the scene was one I shall never forget. But we stayed only a short time, and trekked on westwards towards the Kalongo River, beyond which the Tsetse-fly does not penetrate.

13th February 1879.—On February 1st we reached the Kalongo; on the 3rd we struck a sandy desert, and travelling N.E., began a tedious journey through shifting sands, in which the wagons sank heavily; a sort of film of sand is constantly moving over this district, and makes objects, at any distance over fifty yards, assume grotesque phases. A man walking fifty yards away, seems to be cut off just below the knees, for the sand-drift only rises about eighteen inches. It is impossible to sleep on the ground, and we all camped on the big wagon for the first two nights, and had a most uncomfortable time—only a few at a time being able to sleep, the Swazies cut poles and made stretchers for themselves, and after the second night we followed their example.

The sand-drift seems to have no fixed direction, but blows with the wind. Sir George says it is such microscopic sand, that a very slight wind is sufficient to disturb it. Its effect on our eyes, ears, and noses, is most irritating, and it seems to penetrate everywhere,

we taste it in our biscuits and beef, and in our drinking water, it gets into our beards and hair, fills our socks and boots, and nearly drives us crazy. The mules and horses look miserable, and scarcely touch the maize with which we feed them. Another day or two of this country and we shall lose all our animals. This afternoon we change our route to N.N.E.

CHAPTER VII

LATE on the afternoon of the thirteenth of February 1879, a caravan was making its way slowly across a sandy plain far north-east of the Victoria Falls in South Africa, in front rode a party of horsemen, behind them came two heavily-laden mule wagons; and one or two Europeans, and a small body of Kafirs—Amaswazis—brought up the rear.

As far as the eye could reach on every side, there was no break in the monotonous landscape,—everywhere the long stretches of sand, with neither bush nor tree. The sinking sun still dazzled the eyes of the wayfarers, whose cracked lips and scorched faces bore evidence of long exposure to its intensity.

On, on they toiled, dogged and silent, even the Hot-tentot drivers seemed too exhausted to shout at their mules, on whom the heavy whips fell at frequent intervals. The horsemen in front turned in their saddles occasionally, and watched the slow movements of the train, but they seldom spoke. The Amaswazies, with bloodshot eyes, sullen faces, and bare legs enveloped in the fine clouds of sand, tramped heavily along in the

wake of the wagons, halting now and again while the jaded mules rested from their task.

At last the leader of the advance guard halted his men, and awaited the arrival of the wagons.

'Outspan!' he cried in a hoarse voice.

Presently the animals were released, and sparingly watered and fed upon mealies, the men tied their horses to a rope stretched between the two wagons, the drivers tethered their mules, and a rough meal was taken standing. A little later a number of rough litters were off-loaded from the wagons, the men, both white and black, stretched themselves upon them, and rested from their labours.

On the top of one wagon Sir George Pomeroy, bearded, bronzed, and travel-stained, sat smoking; beside him, still munching his unpalatable meal, was Bertram Dalmayne. Sir George regarded his companion curiously. 'It has been an awful day, but you seem to have kept your appetite.'

Dalmayne laughed. 'Yes, I'm quite ashamed of it, but this stuff is not half bad.'

'Pah! it's half sand!'

'It is a bit gritty, isn't it? But we'll be through this plain soon now, I suppose?'

'I'm sure I don't know. Varney's plan shows us to be within a mile or so of the mountains—that is partly why I climbed up here, when the sun goes down we might get a glimpse of them.'

'That's why I joined you, but the sun is pretty well down now, and there is nothing visible.'

They sat silently side by side till the darkness fell. 'It's no use watching any longer,' Dalmayne said at last. 'I shall go round the camp and see that everything is ship-shape.'

The night set in a shade cooler, but still very close and oppressive; the men turned wearily upon their stretchers—now and again a sleeper was precipitated into the sand owing to his supports slipping, and through the darkness came the muffled sounds of strong language as the rough resting-place was re-adjusted. Towards midnight a strong wind rose up driving the sand before it in clouds, the air grew more oppressive, in the east a few flashes of lightning illuminated the sky. Well acquainted with the quick transitions of the African climate as most of the travellers were, they were quite unprepared for the sudden downpour of rain which fell as the dawn was breaking. Down it came in great heavy drops, faster and faster, the while the wind drove furiously, the lightning zigzagged across the heavens, and the thunder crashes came loud and deep. The defenceless horses and mules, drenched and frightened, huddled miserably together, the troopers, wet to the skin, struggled for shelter under the wagons; only the Amaswazies, quick-witted and resourceful, drove their stretchers deeper into the sand, and stretching their blankets across them made a slight protection from the storm.

Until about eight o'clock the rain continued to fall fast and furious, but it then abated somewhat, and Sir George, Dalmayne, and Cawley, who had been endeavouring to steady the mules and horses, met in the little space between the wagons.

‘It is clearing up, sir,’ said Cawley. ‘I’d better give out the provisions now—a feed will cheer the men up.’

Sir George nodded. ‘Presently, but we may as well wait a little longer; if we strip back the tarpaulin now, the stores will get wet—we must not risk that.’

They were standing near the tail of the smaller wagon, and as Sir George spoke the flap of the tent was drawn back and Mrs. Firmin’s face appeared at the opening.

‘Look!’ she cried, pointing eastward.

Their eyes followed the direction of her hand, and there, close by, within a mile or so at most, rose up from the yellow sands a great frowning range of ochre-coloured mountains, the tops of which were lost in the low-lying hazy clouds.

Dalmayne gave a loud cry—‘The Umganowie!’—and the whole camp seemed to respond. The Amaswazies and troopers started from their places of shelter and stared incredulously at the unexpected sight.

Sir George dived into the larger wagon and reappeared with a field-glass, with which he swept the range intently.

‘Look, Dalmayne,’ he said, pointing north-easterly.

In the direction indicated the range seemed to terminate in a bold bluff corresponding to the description given by Adam Varney. In a few minutes, in spite of the still falling rain, the men had burrowed under the tarpaulin and passed out the rations. Half-an-hour for breakfast and then inspan smartly, was the order, but even in that short time the sun had come out, the rain had ceased, and the voyageurs looking at the mysterious mountains saw the clouds lift higher and higher, disclosing strange battlemented peaks on the upper portions of the range; but while the higher portions disclosed themselves the lower parts grew more and more indistinguishable from the adjacent plain and the sun grew higher in the heavens.

While the caravan laboured along towards the bluff, Sir George and Cawley, with half-a-dozen of the most active troopers, scaled the nearest heights, and after a long and arduous climb saw to the south-east a sort of claw or double spear running easterly, and through its centre flowed a stream of water. From where they stood they could hear the dull booming noise of distant falls, and beyond, in the distance, a sandy track of country through which ran a silver thread—the silent river of Adam Varney's narrative!

It was not a single range of mountains as shown in Varney's chart. Running parallel with the ridge on which they stood, and only separated by a narrow ravine was another range lower than the western one, and beyond that still another one. It was down this

third range that the principal stream seemed to descend to feed the ever-falling volume of water which surely hid the caves of Isban-Israel !

They gazed long at the wonderful sight; then, having made a rough sketch of the position, rejoined the caravan at mid-day.

In the afternoon, on harder ground, the wagons travelled more quickly. The mounted men were thrown out in skirmishing order, but the Amaswazies were still kept in the rear. As the main body came upon a patch of mimosa bushes Mallee Dick suddenly signalled to Dalmayne.

A little to the left, beneath a spreading tree, there was what appeared to be a broken sapling trunk or root, but closer inspection showed that it was a broken ox-yoke.

A few words from Dalmayne to Sir George, and the caravan stopped. Shovels were taken from the wagon and the men began to dig.

The Amaswazies crowded round, but Sir George ordered them back.

The hole grew deeper, the ox-yoke was extricated, and Mallee Dick looked up for instructions.

Dalmayne beckoned to him to hand him the spade, and, with his ruddy face set very stern, continued to throw out the sand. The hole grew longer and deeper, a hush fell upon the watchers as they noted that it grew into the shape of a grave. The sandy soil fell dribbling in almost as fast as it was thrown out, and a

couple of willing fellows stood by to keep the sides clear.

Deeper Dalmayne dug, and deeper ; presently he put the spade on one side and knelt down, burrowing with his fingers in the loose soil. He held up a small piece of rotten canvas which crumbled in Mrs. Firmin's hands as he passed it to her.

Still kneeling, he burrowed cautiously, till with a slight shudder he swept back from one end a mass of sand, disclosing to view a shapeless something, at the sight of which his face grew very pale.

Once more the shovels, cautiously used, and then, bending down, he lifted with rare gentleness something from which came a flash of yellow and a glimmer of white. He laid his burden gently on the ground,—those who stood by saw a roll of canvas, torn and rotten : from between the rents there glimmered the bones of a human being, and at one end a small skull outlined itself against a mass of what was once a wealth of golden hair.

Dalmayne put his hand gently into the rude shroud, and lifted out a small golden collar which he handed to Sir George Pomeroy, who was kneeling by the remains.

Dr. Ascott bent forward and took a quick glance at it.

'Except that it is smaller, it is the exact counterpart of the collar worn by Adam Varney,' he said to Mrs. Firmin. She nodded silently, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

For a space no one moved, all eyes were fixed on the poor human remains, but presently Sir George broke the silence. 'Canvas and thread, Cawley,' he said to his sergeant in a hoarse whisper.

Before very long a new shroud enveloped all that was left of Isabel Clayton; encasing this in a coffin, hastily made from store boxes, they placed her once more in the lonely grave in which she had lain so long.

The wagons moved on past small clumps of mimosa, keeping close in to the range. The horsemen in front reported no sign of life visible: and so the long afternoon sped on. As they passed under the shadow of the great cliffs many a man glanced apprehensively upwards, but from the heights there came no battle-cry, no warning note, no living thing seemed to have dominion there.

At sundown they came full in view of the great falls and on a little plateau a rough laager was made, the horses and mules secured, and watches set. - No fires were lit, but the men had a hearty meal and a ration of grog.

In Mrs. Firmin's wagon Sir George held council with his friends, and ere they separated it was arranged that as soon as it was light enough to see their way, they should attack in three parties. Sir George would not hear of any overtures for peace. 'I have changed my mind. They would not understand us, it is throwing away our lives,' he said, when Ascott suggested attempting to conciliate the cave-dwellers.

Sir George, Dr. Ascott, and twelve troopers were to start for the falls, and effect an entrance through the great cave. Cawley, with Matatyowie and the Amaswazies, were to make their way round the spur and enter the caves overlooking the inner plain, while Dalmayne, Mallee Dick, and five troopers were to endeavour to find the entrance from which the cattle and sheep were nightly driven. The remaining troopers with the Hottentots remained with Mrs. Firmin to guard the camp.

Dalmayne, having the longest journey, set off with Mallee Dick and his five comrades while it was still dark, and trusting to the noise of the falls to drown their advance, soon covered the space to the 'neck.' Here they waited until darkness gave place to dawn.

The little plain below was quite hidden by a light mist. As they made their way down the slopes of the rise they were obliged to hold hands in order to keep together. Across the small plain in a south-westerly direction and up the opposite slope, breathless and excited they pursued their way, till a coign of vantage was gained amongst the bushes and rocks from which they could observe what transpired.

The sky grew lighter, the mist slowly lifted, and presently they could faintly distinguish Cawley's party emerging from the ravine.

With straining eyes they peered into the misty plain, but there was no sign of goats or other live stock to guide them to the entrance.

The first red rays of the sun shot athwart the sky, deepening and deepening; the mist floated into thin wreaths and disappeared; the plain lay bared to their eager glances.

Above them, westwards, the beetling cliffs punctuated with dark rifts, caves, and fissures, reared almost perpendicularly. Hugging the opposite cliffs, Cawley and the Swazies were moving stealthily along. Dalmayne was watching their silent advance admiringly, when a light touch from Mallee Dick startled him. Without moving, Dick glanced his eyes upward: following the direction, Dalmayne presently discerned the dark figure of a gigantic Kafir mid-way up the cliffs. The man was standing at the mouth of one of the caves, and appeared to be intently watching the advance of Cawley and his companions, and evidently had not discovered the party so much closer to him.

With a slight gesture Dalmayne warned his companions, and crouching well into the brushwood they awaited events.

Like a tall black statue the watcher stood. He wore no garments but a dark loin-cloth, and from the plain below would evidently be invisible.

Led by Matatyowie and Cawley the Swazies came closer and closer. Dalmayne, intently watching the spy, could almost have sworn that he made a derisive gesture at his foes below, but a second look showed the man as before: alert, watchful, but motionless.

The Swazies stood at last on the bare plateau,

peering here and there into the shallow caves which seemed but a few feet long. Dalmayne could see them, like so many rabbits, rushing from one cave to another, but always returning baffled.

At last they drew up around Cawley and Matatyowie—a black clustering mass, gesticulating and pointing upwards. They were now so close to the cliffs that the watcher above was unable to see them without bending forward. At last he did so, and Dalmayne's party could see the glistening of his glossy skin in the sunshine.

Mallee Dick made a motion with his rifle. 'I could pop him off easy now, sir!' he said in a suppressed whisper; but his leader shook his head.

'Wait!' he muttered.

Some of the Swazies were clambering up the steep face of the cliff, with the evident intention of forcing their way into the higher tiers of caves.

The watcher noted their movement and stepped back into the cave. Almost instantly a dark shadow crept into the mouth of each of the adjacent caves, and now Dalmayne could see the long-handled battle-axes with which they were armed.

Speaking in a low voice, and scarcely moving his body, lest he should attract attention, he whispered to his men to wait till the Hamie stepped forward to strike the climbers, and then fire. There were only four of the Amaswazies at all close to their waiting enemies. Dalmayne chose the farthest Hamie for his own target,

motioned Mallee Dick to take the second, and two others to take the remainder. The other troopers to hold their fire until they saw the result.

The foremost climber was Matatyowie himself. With wonderful agility the big fellow clung, twisted, and climbed upwards. At his back hung his rifle and assegais, his cloak and shield he had left behind. Higher and higher he climbed—a few feet more and he would be upon the ledge. The watchers on the slope saw the Hamie draw back and raise his battle-axe shoulder high, a moment later and Matatyowie’s hand grasped the ledge, and he drew himself upward. The great axe rose—ping!

As the smoke cleared away Dalmayne saw the Amaswazie still clinging to the rock and plucking with one hand at his assegais; above him, with his face almost touching him, the great Hamie lay—dead!

They saw Matatyowie draw his assegai in readiness, and slowly gain the ledge. At the same moment Mallee Dick and one of the troopers fired, and one great Hamie fell with a sickening thud almost upon the group surrounding Cawley on the plain below.

From caves and crevices before unseen, the Hamie sprang forth at the sound of the rifles. Cawley, seeing the uselessness of remaining where he was, joined Dalmayne, and as the Swazies clambered like ants up the steep cliffs, and their enemies came out to meet them, the band on the slopes poured volley after volley upon the great cave-men. The air grew thick

with smoke. The Swazies' deep 'Waugh! Waugh!' mingled with the rattle of the rifles, and the encouraging shouts of the troopers.

'I can't stand this,' cried Dalmayne. 'You stop here and pick the niggers off, Cawley; I'll try and scale that place.'

He pointed to the place he had decided upon, and before Cawley could remonstrate, had slung his rifle over his head and was climbing the rocks in the wake of the Swazies.

CHAPTER VIII

WHILE Dalmayne and Cawley were busy in the rear of the Falls, Sir George Pomeroy, with Dr. Ascott and the troopers, were moving cautiously to the front. Just as the first streaks of sunrise glinted the hilltops, the party had gained the slippery rocks at the foot of the falling water. The spray and foam splashed their faces, and the roar of the cascade deafened their ears.

For a brief space Sir George halted to scrutinise his surroundings, then stepping forward into the spray on the left, he led his men through it, and on to the narrow path beyond. Obedient to instructions, each man went down upon his hands and knees, until the narrow ridge which lay between the black gulf and the face of the cliff, was traversed.

The place was absolutely dark, and the journey perilous in the extreme. The men groped their way foot by foot, and it was many minutes before Sir George found the entrance to the great cave. There was a dim light from the farther end—just sufficient to enable them to distinguish the grim outlines of the Hamie of whom Adam Varney had written. There they sat in

their icy chamber, two long dusky rows; here and there the white plumes, caught by the eddying draughts, nodded over the silent forms. Clambering in, Sir George and his followers traversed the cavern unmolested, the troopers, who knew something of the story, gazing awestruck at the giant sentinels.

The eight steps running upwards from the left-hand corner were discovered without difficulty, and mounting these the party came to a small untenanted cavern from which other steps led still farther upwards, terminating in another cave larger and lighter than the first.

Peering cautiously in, the leader saw that here at least they would meet with opposition. Standing and sitting about, were ten or twelve of the great Kafirs, the greater number being towards the farther end of the cave where the light was best. Even as Sir George glanced in, one of the cave-men sauntered towards him; in his hand he carried a great battle-axe, which he swung in unison with his stride. There was no space to draw back, the men behind still pressing up the steps prevented that. For a second the great Hamie stared, then with a warning shout to his comrades he sprang forward with uplifted axe—only to fall heavily to the ground with a bullet through his brain from Sir George's revolver.

Before the other cave-men could come to close quarters, the troopers sent a volley into them, and the air was thick with smoke—through it with wild, fierce cries there broke two of the Hamie. 'Antāan!—

Antāan! Isban-ben-Israel,' they shouted, as they fell upon their assailants, but their valour was in vain. The rifles belched forth at close quarters, and in a few moments, as the caves cleared somewhat of the smoke, Sir George saw the ground covered with the gigantic bodies of the strange Kafirs. Only one trooper was badly hurt in the rush of the two Hamie, and leaving him with a companion only slightly touched, they pressed on to the next chamber, which Ascott recognised as the one in which Captain Clayton had found his daughters. He glanced around hastily, with a half hope that the captives might be there; but, save for their own party, the place was untenanted.

A loud shout from Sir George, and a headlong rush of several of the troopers startled him. At the inner side of the cave he just caught sight of an aperture which closed up as he gazed. Too late Sir George and the men endeavoured to obstruct the great slab—it rolled noiselessly into its socket, and remained immovable.

Round and round the cave the party hunted for egress, but everywhere, save where the great slab had closed up, the rocks were solid. Mindful of Adam Varney's story, Ascott groped about in search of one of the projecting knobs of which he had spoken, but in vain.

Sir George held a hurried consultation with the doctor, and despatched three of the men back to the wagons for picks and crowbars. He was afraid to

use gunpowder, lest harm should come to those of whom they were in search.

During the long period which elapsed before the messengers returned, the men made an exhaustive search for other means of entering the inner caves; but their efforts were futile, and Sir George at length ordered them to desist, and try the lower caves through which they had passed.

While the search in the lower caves was still going on, the messengers returned with the tools, and the news that rapid firing was going on on the other side of the Falls. Chagrined at their previous non-success, the troopers returned from the lower chambers, and set to work with a will; but the massive rocks defied their efforts, and hour after hour passed away while they were no nearer to success.

Despairing of gaining an entrance from this position, Sir George drew off his men, and made another search in the lower caves—especially examining the far end of the large chamber which the dead Hamie guarded.

At last convinced of the futility of the attempt, the party emerged from the caves, and, recrossing the chasm under the Falls, made their way round the spur and up the slopes over which Dalmayne and Cawley had travelled. They could hear no firing now, and when at last they found themselves on the plain at the bottom of the enclosure, none of their comrades were in sight.

Alarmed and mystified, Sir George made his way

up the opposite slope to where Dalmayne and his men had lain in ambush. Here the tracks were plain, and following them up, they found that the whole party, white and black, were on the cliffs high overhead. They could see them moving hither and thither amongst the great crags; but no sound of firing reached them.

‘We must join them, Ascott,’ cried Sir George.

The doctor nodded; he had been consumed with impatience while in the caves, and grudged every minute now. With a rush and scramble they traversed the first few yards of the steep incline; but once the climbing began, the progress was slow and dangerous.

It was midday when at last, tired, bruised, hungry, and disappointed, they reached the summit of the cliff, and found Dalmayne and Cawley, with their respective parties, gloomily eating their rations.

Sir George flung himself down by Dalmayne.

‘Well?’ he asked.

‘We’ve done nothing except put them on their guard; the beggars had all the caves blocked below. The Swazies climbed to the first terraces and tried to effect an entrance; we shot several of the Hamie, but those within closed up all the entrances. We worked from terrace to terrace, but it was the same all through, only that at last they did not even dispute the way with us, but simply closed the caves. Several times we saw the big rocks moving along to block the entrance, but we were powerless to stop them. Couldn’t you get in from the front?’

Sir George shook his head. 'I'm afraid it is a bigger business than I expected,' he said reflectively. 'Are there any caves near here?'

'No; the last tier is a good way down—that is, as far as the entrances go. The roofs may be a few inches from where we sit, for all I know.'

The last comers were lying about eating their mid-day meal; and Ascott, opening his haversack, proffered some food to Sir George.

'Thank you, doctor. You were unlucky to have been with my party,' the baronet said, regarding Ascott's bleeding fingers.

'Oh, that's nothing!' he answered lightly. 'Look at Dalmayne.'

The Australian was almost black with gunpowder, dust and perspiration. A cut, received when climbing, had let a little blood trickle down his face, and his general appearance was startling.

He was lying full length on his back, shielding his face from the sun with his hat, and was paying no attention to his companions.

'What are you thinking of, Dalmayne?'

'A plan. Don't you remember, in Varney's story, that the Umklanans came every day into the great hall and performed their rites? Well, a stream of light filtered through from above on to the altar—do you remember? There must be some opening up here through which that light came. We've got to find it, and get in that way.'

‘Why, man!’ ejaculated Ascott, ‘the hall is in the second tier of caves. How many feet do you think we are above it?’

‘I don’t know; but if we find the opening, we’ll soon manage to enter,’ the Australian cried, springing up. ‘I’ve a rough idea of where the hall is.’

They followed him as he strode right over to the farther claw and peered down at the falling water. Making a rough guess as to the centre, he stepped off some fifty or sixty feet and halted. ‘We’ll call this the end of the big cave,’ he said, marking the spot.

‘I can help you there,’ cried Sir George, ‘for I have just been through those caves.’ So saying, he stepped off to the left—‘This is the little cave.’ Again to the left, and rather more westerly—‘and this is the cave where the sentinels were; and this,’ he added presently, ‘is about where the girls were imprisoned.’

No one seemed to doubt Adam Varney’s story now; they spoke of his tale as a fact, of his characters as real persons. And Dalmayne smiled a little sadly as he observed it.

‘The girls’ cave would be about here,’ said Sir George, ‘and the entrance to the hall about where those big rocks are. . . .’

‘And the altar was in the middle of the hall,’ interjected Dalmayne, starting forward towards a spot where there were a number of jagged rocks. ‘That’s the place!’

His enthusiasm was infectious. The men came

hurrying up—troopers and Amaswazies shouldering each other in their eagerness.

Meanwhile Dalmayne, clambering in among the boulders, peered here and there fruitlessly; and the Swazies, convinced that they were on the trail of their enemies, began wrenching at the great stones.

'Stop them, Matatyowie! Stop them!' cried Ascott suddenly. 'Look here, Dalmayne!'

Dalmayne wriggled up slowly. 'What is it?'

'You won't be able to see in the day-time—the altar.'

'Right you are!' cried Dalmayne, 'what an ass I am—do you see, Sir George?' he added turning to his chief.

'Not quite.'

'In the day-time we can't see down there, the small flame on the altar would not be visible and they would see us. At night we could see it and it would guide us; besides, at night there will be less chance of detection. In the story you know it was only in the day-time the priests came and the acolytes gazed up towards the light watching for some sign.'

'And you propose—?'

'Sending back to the wagons for rheims, ropes, and provisions, and getting ready a long knotted rope by which to descend.'

'It is risky, but it seems the only chance. You understand, Cawley?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, see that all the rhympie and rope at the

wagons is collected and provisions sent up for all hands. And send up a couple of crowbars and a screw-wrench too, Cawley,’ added Dalmayne as the sergeant stepped off to instruct Matatyowie.

When the messengers at last returned the men set to work under Dalmayne’s guidance to bind, splice, and twist the big pile of rope and rhympie. Later, when the darkness fell, Sir George despatched half a dozen troopers to the hill-side with instructions to keep firing into the centre of the cliffs in order to attract the attention of the cave-dwellers; and no sooner had the first flash been seen than those on the summit commenced operations. Dalmayne, Ascott, and Sir George, with Cawley and Mallee Dick crawled over the great pile of boulders, listening and peering for a clew.

Mallee Dick was the discoverer, ‘ Co-o-ee ! ’ he cried in a low jubilant tone.

Hastening to him and lying by his side Dalmayne could distinguish a faint light in the depths below; at times it faded, then brightened, and waned like a distant star.

All round the spot the men had gathered in a dark semicircle. ‘ We must lug this fellow out, sir,’ cried Cawley, putting his hand on a boulder.

The men fixed hides and ropes on the jutting pinnacles and pulled with all their might while Cawley and Mallee Dick prized away with the crowbars. Inch by inch the big rock shifted, but it took fully an hour

to move it clear of the opening which it had partly concealed, and when it did move a few feet it fell back amongst the other boulders.

Several others had to be moved ever so little before the way was won, and it was nearly eleven o'clock when the last rock was rolled back and an opening about three feet square revealed. Owing to the rocks having only been prized back there was no level space near the hole, and the adventurers had to lie over the adjacent rocks to peer down into the great hall.

Everything was dim and undistinguishable: now and then the fire on the altar flickered into a flame and partly revealed a slight white-clad form, but the light was only momentary.

After a few words with Sir George, Dalmayne placed the two crowbars firmly over the opening and commenced to let the long rope fall, foot by foot, into the gaping chasm, while the others bent eagerly forward to watch the result.

The whole length had been dropped, but no sign came from below, nor could they see if the rope touched the bottom.

Dalmayne stepped across and held out his hand to Sir George, 'Good-bye,' he said, 'wish me luck!'

A half-suppressed murmur made him turn; disappearing into the chasm—only his face just distinguishable in the gloom—was Mallee Dick.

Dalmayne leaned over him. 'Come back, you fool! Come back, Dick!'

‘ And let you go down ? not if I knows it,’ gasped Mallee Dick as he swung out of sight.

They were powerless to stop him, powerless to do anything. The hide rubbed and strained upon the crowbars and they could tell by the vibrations that he was still going down hand over hand ; sometimes they knew by the ceasing of the vibrations that he was resting ; but whether he rested or continued his way the mouth of the opening was crowded with watchers black and white straining their eyes into the depths. It seemed hours to them since he had swung out of sight, and yet every now and then the vibrations of the rope assured them he was still descending.

Suddenly when their patience was almost at an end a faint sound of music reached their ears. A light appeared at the northern end of the hall, far below they saw a strange procession advancing. White-robed men holding in their hands flaming torches, as they marched slowly around the full extent of the hall they chanted a hymn or prayer which sounded to the listeners above like a supplication.

When the circuit of the hall had been traversed thrice they formed a circle, each man being several feet from his neighbour, and advanced very slowly, with downcast heads towards the altar. As they reached the outer step or dais upon which it was raised they held up their torches, a moment later a shout so wild and weird burst upon the air that the watchers above almost lost their balance as they lay peering downwards.

'ALANTHANI! ALANTHANI!' chorused the Umklanas.
'ALANTHANI ARKOS!'

With a simultaneous movement they swung their torches forward and bent upon their knees while they chanted a melody so jubilant and stirring that the watchers held their breath to listen.

'*Great Scott!*' ejaculated Dalmayne, '*look at Mallee Dick!*'

It needed no words of his to call their attention to the Australian—he was the cynosure of both parties.

The rope had been too short to reach the ground, and swinging about in the darkness Mallee Dick had been at his wits' end until the entrance of the priests had sharpened his faculties. A few feet below him burned the altar fire, and, unable to hold on any longer he swung himself towards it and dropped, scattering the small brands with his feet and sending up a shower of sparks.

On the summit he now stood regarding the scene below.

Clad in his scarlet shirt, riding breeches and boots, he stood silently awaiting results; his hat he had discarded before descending and his long unkempt hair hung lankly over his ears. What with the smoke from the remaining smouldering brands and the torches, his face was not distinctly visible to the Umklanas, but they saw a human figure on the altar stone, and dreamed that their atonement was at an end—one of the priests had already been despatched with a message

to Isban-Israel when Mallee Dick, tiring of standing on the limited space available and feeling his feet uncomfortably hot, suddenly hollowed his hands before his mouth and looking upwards emitted a long weird cry such as few of his many hearers had ever heard before.

‘ Co-o-ee! Co-o-ee-ee!! Co-o-oo-ee-ee!’

CHAPTER IX

No sooner had Dalmayne observed Mallee Dick's predicament, than he swung rapidly downwards: strong and lithe he went down hand over hand so fast that he was almost half way when the bushman's eldritch cry reached his ears. Accustomed as he had been from boyhood to the famous Australian bush-cry, the sound of it now startled him to such an extent that he almost lost his hold of the rope. A rapid glance below showed him that Dick was so far safe, and he redoubled his exertions.

The sudden cry from the Australian fairly electrified the Umklanias. They raised their torches higher and gazed in wonderment and awe upon the strange figure. From the western end there came a diversion—the messenger who had carried the tidings to Isban-Israel returned hurriedly, and striking his stave loudly on the floor, gave a signal, at which the Umklanias faced to the north-west with bowed heads. Following closely behind the messenger and acknowledging the obeisances of the priests, the King stepped close up to the altar, and throwing back his hood gazed earnestly

at the motionless form on the summit of the altar. As he looked, various changes passed over his face, awe, wonderment, doubt, suspicion, anger, mirrored themselves on his mobile countenance. With a swift gesture he snatched a torch from the nearest priest, and, holding it close to Mallee Dick's legs, made rapid signals with his disengaged hand.

In obedience to his wordless order, the priests sprang back to the walls, and gradually extended themselves round the Hall; before they had finished the King and several of the Umklanans detected Dalmayne's rapidly descending figure. As he dropped lightly to the floor, they rushed in on him. From his vantage ground, Mallee Dick with a revolver in each hand opened fire upon them; two of the Umklanans fell, and with a rush Dalmayne swung himself up alongside Mallee Dick.

The Umklanans ran in upon them and with their heavy staves struck at them furiously, regardless of the shots fired from the revolvers.

The Hall echoed with the reports of the fire-arms; but the fight could not last long, several of the Umklanans had fallen, and their staves were not long enough to do serious damage. Seeing this, Isban-Israel himself opened the northern door and admitted four of the great Hamie, pointing significantly to the intruders as he did so. With wild yells they sped across the intervening space, brandishing their battle-axes. Full upon the altar steps the foremost fell with a bullet in his heart; but the other three

springing upwards gained the top steps, and the foremost seizing Mallee Dick around the knees threw him with a dreadful crash on the floor at the priests' feet.

Dalmayne avoided a similar fate by springing lightly down upon the farther side, and as his enemies came upon him again, emptied his last charges full in their faces.

Engrossed in the struggle they had not noticed the hanging rope again, but now as the Umklanas moved farther eastward to view Dalmayne's capture they beheld two of the Amaswazies descending like great black monkeys.

As Dalmayne closed with his fierce antagonists, there was a rattle and swirl behind him, and the Swazies transfixed two of his assailants with their keen assegais. The third Hamie, bleeding, bewildered with the fumes of the gunpowder and the sound of the fire-arms, hung on to his prostrate foe with bulldog pertinacity: unheeding the rush of the Umklanas upon the Amaswazies he watched with bloodshot eyes the whitening face of the Australian.

His battle-axe had fallen down the steps, but his strong sinewy hands were almost as fatal, as he gripped his enemy's throat and moved him slowly to and fro in his rage.

Suddenly, as the Umklanas pursued the agile Swazies, there was a crashing sound, followed by another, and another; the Umklanas halted and

stared at the great bundles which had fallen, but the Amaswazies, taking advantage of their hesitation, rushed forward and threw their bundles of dry grass and twigs upon the almost extinct altar fire. In a moment a great sheet of flame flared up. The whole hall was illuminated, and from the orifice above rang out shot upon shot from the Martini-Henrys. Like sheep the Umklanans moved hither and thither, unable to escape the deadly hail.

Isban-Israel, who had stood stonily regarding the scene, alone remained calm. Catching a distracted Umklana by the arm, he signalled to him, and a minute later those who were uninjured had fled with their King through the northern door, and apparently only the dead and dying were left to keep the two Amaswazies company.

But one of the latter chancing to glance towards the far side of the altar saw the wounded Hamie bending over Dalmayne's body, and quick as light he picked up the discarded battle-axe, and with an exultant war-cry, brought it down full upon the head of his enemy.

'Wough!' cried Matatyowie fiercely, as he examined the great weapon which he had seized.

In rapid succession the troopers and Amaswazies from above swung themselves down into the hall, until Sir George had enough with him to justify a further advance.

While Ascott busied himself with Dalmayne and

Mallee Dick, Sir George and Cawley proceeded to the northern end, the men having previously secured the torches of the dead Umklanias. In accordance with the instructions given by Adam Varney a search was made for the projecting knobs—this time with success, for a turn with a screw-wrench sent the great stone rolling slowly backward, revealing a long dark corridor running northerly.

Directly the opening was wide enough to admit them, the foremost Swazies rushed headlong into the darkness—almost instantly there was a tramp of many feet, a clash of weapons, and upon the crowd waiting their turn to enter, a band of the gigantic Hamie fell like wild beasts.

They had discarded their battle-axes, and were armed with short-handled stabbing assegais. Sir George and Cawley both went down under the rush—Sir George with a great gash across his forehead, but the sergeant only bruised and shaken.

Though the Hamie had swept their opponents from the corridor like chaff before the wind, they were now themselves at a disadvantage, for having gained the great Hall, they turned to retrace their steps,—to find Matatyowie's men in a solid mass barring the way, while at the side stood the troopers.

As the Hamie recovered from their headlong charge and turned to charge again, the troopers opened a deadly fire upon them—having now an excellent light to fire by. Undaunted, those who survived rushed

forward to regain the corridor. A good three feet in front of his men, Matatyowie, furious and bleeding, stood slowly swinging his great axe, as the enemy came on he swung it round with a great effort right into their faces. The leading men halted and stumbled over their fallen companions, and the troopers fired again; the Amaswazies chanted their ominous ‘ Wough, Wough!’ and like wolves sprang at the few remaining Hamie.

Cawley having picked himself up and taken in the position of affairs, dragged Sir George to the other end of the corridor to the light, and bound up his bleeding head; then rushing back he witnessed the final stand of the three or four Hamie.

‘ Poor devils,’ he muttered, as Matatyowie’s men cut them down, ‘ they are brave fellows.’ Then, seeing that as far as they were concerned it was all over, he called on his men to follow, and led them into the ante-chamber.

Not having Sir George’s knowledge, Cawley was unable to locate the doorway, and at last returned to ask him for instructions, but the baronet had swooned, and running hastily back to the Hall, he interrogated Dr. Ascott, who, having done what he could for Dalmayne, was busy over Mallee Dick’s mangled body.

The doctor was absorbed in his work, and did not deign to reply till he had finished.

‘ There!’ he said at last, ‘ that’s all I can do for him,

poor fellow! Come along, Cawley, I know pretty well where it should be.'

They found the bolt easily enough under the doctor's supervision, and presently were in the chamber which Dr. Ascott recognised as that in which Adam Varney had found Captain Clayton and his daughters when he was removed from the great hall.

There was no occupant of the chamber now: upon the carved table there lay two long supple wands, and from one of the tall chairs or thrones a purple scarf trailed to the floor.

The troopers and Amaswazies searched diligently for similar projections to those they had already found, but the torches burnt low, and the daylight was creeping in from the chinks and crevices at the western side before they were successful. As they raised a shout of triumph at their success Dalmayne slowly made his way towards them, and when the big door swung back was the first to cross its threshold.

As he entered a heavy curtain at the farther end was swept aside: a magnificent man stepped forward towards the Australian and gazed upon him haughtily.

His lordly bearing, the dark curling hair which clustered round his shapely head, the symmetrical figure and the luminosity of the wondrous eyes, together with the intense pallor of his face, struck Dalmayne with a sense of awe.

'Isban-Israel!' he said, half aloud.

A slight surprise shewed itself in the dark, tired

eyes. He made no motion, but continued gazing sternly at the intruder.

The troopers and Amaswazies pushed roughly into the chamber. Matatyowie ranged himself by Dalmayne's side with his battle-axe, still dripping blood, upon his shoulder. The King's eyes swept over them disdainfully.

‘ Wough ! ’ growled the impatient Amaswazies, pushing closer still to their leaders.

As their savage murmur fell upon his ears, Isban-Israel drew himself up to his full height and with a haughty gesture waved them back. Before any one could interfere Matatyowie brought the heavy axe down upon the King's neck, striking sideways. Too late to stop the blow Cawley caught the tall form as it swayed forward, and gently placed it on the floor. There was no need to turn back the blue robe; the savage blow had done its work. Isban-Israel was dead.

For a moment they stood looking down upon the body. Then Cawley drew a fold of the gown over the dead King's face, and the search went on.

Cave after cave was explored without result, and Dalmayne feeling sure the whole bottom tier must have been examined, they began searching in the next floor, discovering ere long a large well-lighted chamber, in which some little children, clad in short byssus tunics, were playing on the sanded floor. Beyond them a small group of women and girls were eagerly peering

through the chinks and crannies which overlooked the inner plain.

The wondering cries of the children gave the women the first intimation of the presence of intruders. With exclamations of fear some hid their faces in their gowns, while others fled shrieking towards the southern end of the cavern.

One beautiful and stately woman alone betrayed no alarm, but walking towards the children snatched up one lovely little fellow who sat placidly on the floor observing the newcomers.

Dalmayne stepped towards her. 'Don't be frightened,' he said, 'we won't hurt him.'

The woman's dark eyes rested on him inquiringly.

'We won't hurt you,' he repeated gently.

She made a slight swaying movement of her body. 'Nabene.'

Like a flash there came into Dalmayne's mind the memory of Adam Varney's description of his nurse.

'*Esther!*' he cried, stepping closer, '*Esther!!*'

She stepped backward proudly, but with a little smile hovering upon her lips.

'Adaām,' Dalmayne said, interrogatively; 'Adaām? Deeck?'

Her eyes grew larger and brighter. '*Adaām!*' she said fearfully, looking beyond him at those who stood beyond.

'Adaām,' repeated Dalmayne, closing his eyes and simulating death.

She looked sadly at him as though comprehending, but with no surprise.

' Dick? Deeck?' he said inquiringly, looking round.

' Chalta! Mamie Deēck!' she answered scornfully, with a little stamp of disgust.

' Katie? Miss Kate?' cried Ascott eagerly: ' where?'

She turned towards him with the slow graceful movement which seemed natural to her and regarded him calmly, but with no sign of recognition at the name.

One of the troopers stepped forward with a rough salute to Dalmayne.

' I'll fix her, sir,' he said confidently.

' Ukai chema malootsie Kaia-Susie?'

The woman Esther stared. ' Kaia-Susie?'

' Yeeto! chema malootsie Kaia-Susie?'

She eyed him wonderingly. ' Malootsie, Kaia, Susie?' she repeated, parrot-like.

' She doesn't understand you, Fellowes,' cried Cawley.

' Ask for the queen, Cawley—Ira! that might fetch her.'

' *Ira? Ira-ben-Israel?*' said Cawley, holding up his hands.

From the knot of wondering startled women at the rear, there came a low wail, like an echo of his words—
' Ira-ben-Israel.'

The young trooper Fellowes stepped forward again as Esther repeated her ' Nabene.'

' Give me leave to try again, sir?'

' All right, but be quick, we're wasting time.'

With a spring Fellowes landed himself alongside Esther, and wrenched the child from her arms. With one hand he held his prey, the other clutched a long glittering knife. '*Ira!*' he cried, sternly, holding the knife over the little one's breast.

The child lay quite still in spite of its rude transfer, then its eyes caught the glitter of the blade, and, with a gurgle of delight, two little chubby hands grabbed at it eagerly.

With his eyes fixed sternly on the woman, Fellowes did not see the action, but as the mother's face paled, and her eyes dilated with anguish, he looked down just as the little hands closed on the keen weapon.

With a cry of horror Dalmayne sprang forward and took the bleeding child, Ascott at the same moment coming to his side. The mother, with ashen face, watched their actions, seeming instinctively to guess they were friendly.

Fellowes stood regarding the doctor with a downcast expression. 'I never meant to hurt the little kid,' he muttered uneasily.

The little bleeding fingers were soon bound up, and, with the child in his arms, Dalmayne repeated the Queen's name. '*Ira?*' he said sharply.

The woman looked from side to side, clasped her soft dark hands full length in front of her, while great tears rose in her eyes, and fell upon her gown.

'We *must* know, Dalmayne. Let Fellowes try again,'

said Ascott hesitatingly. ' I hate to do it, but it is the only way.'

The young trooper at a sign came forward again, and held the knife above the child lying in Dalmayne's arms. '*Ira*,' he demanded. '*Ira!*'

She glanced hither and thither, at the weeping women and children behind her. At the throng of stern-faced men in front, and with her hands still held down before her, she answered piteously—

' Nabene.'

Fellowes raised his knife in feigned rage, but with the action the woman sprang upon him fiercely, and, thrusting him aside, held out her arms towards Dalmayne, and cried—

' Malanie! Malanie!'

Without hesitating the Australian handed her the child. ' Oh, damn it all!' he said, as Cawley muttered that they had lost their chance. ' Do you think I am made of stone?'

' It was our only chance, sir. If we don't move soon, Matatyowie won't be able to hold in his men. They are mad for the women, now, and the slightest thing will start them off. You must give them fighting or they'll seize the women.'

' Will they?' Dalmayne said savagely, ' we'll see.'

' But we can't afford to fight them, sir. We are in a fix ourselves. No one knows how many more priests and Hamie there are concealed in other caves. We shall want their help yet.'

Esther had gone back amongst the women, and sat far off regarding the intruders and her injured child alternately.

'Let's try one of the other women?' suggested Cawley.

'No more of that!' exclaimed Dalmayne in disgust.

Cawley made a gesture of despair, and, at the same time, Matatyowie scowling and savage, demanded in his own language how long they were to wait.

'Tell him to go to blazes,' shouted Dalmayne angrily.

'He says his men want the women,' translated Cawley, after listening to another savage growl.

'Men—attention, two paces to the rear—right about face—prepare to fire!' cried Dalmayne furiously, running his words together.

Almost on the instant the troopers had wheeled, taken two backward steps, and raised their rifles almost in the faces of the black mass of Swazies crowding the narrow end of the cave.

'Now! tell him if he doesn't wish his men sent into the next world in one act, to keep them back till I want them,' said Dalmayne turning on Cawley with flashing eyes.

The sergeant did as he was bid, and Matatyowie, with a scowl at Dalmayne, muttered an assent, and addressed his men.

'He has told them to wait a bit,' explained Cawley to Ascott in an undertone, 'but they will be all the harder to deal with by-and-bye.'

Dalmayne was at his wits' end. It would take hours to thoroughly search the big cave for the hidden doors, but it seemed the only thing left to do, and he was about to give orders to that effect when there was another stir among the Swazies, and they parted right and left to let some newcomers pass.

CHAPTER X

LEADING by the hand a small shrunken, and almost nude yellow figure, Sir George dragged himself slowly past the Amaswazies and troopers.

‘It is Dick,’ he said, addressing Dalmayne.

‘Oh, reh ! Yebo-Baas, Dick ! me Dick ! Baas Clayton’s Dick !’

He spoke in a little creaky voice, his shrunken figure shook with a terrible fit of coughing, his small eyes were alight with the prospect of deliverance, and he capered in a feeble grotesque fashion upon his thin wasted legs.

Dalmayne put his hand tenderly upon the monkey-like little fellow. ‘Where’s Miss Katie and the Captain ?’ he asked, ‘do you know ?’

‘Soon find ’em, Baas. Oh, reh ! Soon.’

He tottered feebly towards the farther end of the cave.

‘Here, boy !’ cried Ascott, thrusting a bit of biscuit towards him, and holding out his flask. ‘Eat this.’

‘I thought so, he’s nearly starved,’ he ejaculated, as Dick bolted the biscuit in one piece, and drained the little drop of spirits remaining in the flask.

The nourishment, small as it was, gave him fresh strength, and accompanied by Sir George, Dalmayne, Ascott, and three troopers, he passed through the group of trembling women to the far end of the cave. Before many minutes he had discovered a secret door, which, as it swung back, discovered a small spiral stair-way of stone.

Fearing to take any more troopers lest the Amaswazies should turn upon the women, the party made their way upwards, Dalmayne first, Trooper Fellowes last.

Half way up, as the others followed the curving steps, Fellowes stepped backwards, suddenly grasped from behind by a strong brown arm. The knife he had threatened the child with, and which had been slipped again into the sheath at his belt, was driven remorselessly into his back, and with a gurgling cry, drowned by the clank of the feet of his comrades on the stone steps above, he sank backwards into the arms of his enemy, who clutched at his rifle as it fell, and, leaving him upon the stairs, fled once more into the cave.

In places the stairway was quite dark, in others chinks nearly half an inch wide let in bright strips of light. They climbed higher and higher till at last they reached a little platform about six feet square; across one end of which a heavy curtain swung in the draught created by two long loopholes which overlooked the plain.

The Australian drew back the curtain. Within, apparently expecting him, sat one whom he knew must be Ira, the King's sister.

He bowed as he met her cold glance. 'Ira-ben-Israel!' he said, advancing a step forward.

Her great eyes flashed scornfully at him, a faint derisive smile just parted her lips, but she made no answer.

Sir George pushed past him—gaunt, bloody, and struggling to regain his breath after the long climb. In his hands he held a miniature which he held towards the Queen.

She regarded him stonily for a second, then her eyes fell upon the pictured face he held towards her, and she drew a long breath as she gazed.

It was the last picture taken of Katie Clayton ere she left Pretoria, and the Queen evidently recognised it. Her full lips closed ominously, the cold eyes grew harder still, the tassel of the cord which bound her waist, and which she had held negligently in her hand, fell to the ground.

Sir George's voice shook. 'Where?' he cried, passionately.

She understood his meaning if not his words, and an evil smile of triumph played for an instant upon her lips; then she looked away through the roughly hewn loophole at her side, and appeared unconscious of his existence.

'She can't be dead. Good Heavens! she can't be dead,' muttered Sir George wearily to Ascott.

‘Dick doesn’t know. He hasn’t seen her since he’s been here; but he knows all about their secret doors. He’s our man.’

‘Oh, reh!’ squeaked Dick. ‘Dick’s the man, Baas—yah!’

Ira looked round at the sound of the grating voice.

‘Oh, hell!’ gasped Dick. ‘Kill her, Baas! Kill her!’ he cried viciously; ‘she have Dick shut up—yah!’ he muttered spitefully, as he looked at the stately woman.

‘She shan’t touch you. You find a door. Hamba checha,’ growled Ascott.

With one eye on the Queen, Dick roved slowly round the chamber, peering and poking, now on the floor, now higher up; but always watching Ira suspiciously.

‘Make her jump—footsack!’ he screeched, suddenly pointing at her with a thin yellow finger.

‘Leave her alone, boy. Look for the door,’ Ascott said soothingly.

‘Make her jump, I say. Door along there,’ Dick squeaked excitedly. ‘I see him!’

The Queen’s eyes gleamed ominously at the lad, but he took no notice.

‘I see him!’ he cried again. ‘You make her jump!’

‘He means make her move,’ explained a trooper.

Dalmayne motioned her to rise, but she made no motion; he put out his hand, and she withered him with a stare.

‘I can’t lay hands on her, Ascott.’

'Will either of you men?' Ascott asked, addressing the trooper.

One of them stepped forward, and placing his rifle and belt against the wall, advanced to the Queen in a determined manner.

She rose to her full height, while her eyes flashed lightning glances at him. With an imperious gesture she raised her hands, and said in English, 'Go!'

For a second the man hesitated, then he put out his arms to seize her. With blazing eyes and parted lips, she drew closer to the wall, her whole form vibrating with rage and contempt.

Dick flew past the trooper and knelt upon the floor. A moment's pause, and the wall opened before him, disclosing a tiny chamber with only one small narrow opening on the western side.

There was no furniture—not even of the rough description they had seen in the other rooms; indeed, there was hardly room for anything but the rough slab, about two feet wide and eighteen inches in breadth, which stretched from side to side. Lying upon this was a human form, draped in a garment of coarse black byssus, over which straggled a mass of tangled silvery hair, so long that some of it trailed upon the ground.

The occupant of this solitary cell remained quite motionless, neither the noise of the opening door, nor the murmur of pity which the men gave vent to at the sight had any effect.

Dalmayne stepped forward and placed one of his hands lightly on the form, but still there was no sign, and with a quick gesture, as if he could not bear the suspense, the Australian threw back the mass of hair, disclosing the features of an old woman.

Her skin was of a deathly pallor, her eyes closed, her lean arms projected above her head, and were fastened by a chain to a ring in the wall. The men gazed at her in dread, but Dr. Ascott reassured them.

‘She is breathing,’ he said, pointing to the slight movement of the gown where it covered her breast.

With a hatchet one of the men broke a link in the heavy chain, and then taking the thin slight figure in his arms, the Australian stepped back to the Queen’s chamber.

As they entered with their burden the Queen turned her dark luminous eyes upon them questioningly; seeing what they carried, her face lit up with hate, and in her eyes there came a baleful light.

‘L’isthani!’ she said in a deep rich voice, and as she spoke the newly released prisoner opened her eyes, and gazed in the direction of the voice.

With the opening of her eyes, the whole face of the woman seemed to alter, the deadly whiteness still remained, but the unstrung lips grew tighter together; the nostrils quivered, and from the grey eyes there flashed an answering light of defiance and despair. The face grew younger with the look, and the Australian and his companions gazed with amazement, as

the eyes of the two women met and spoke in mute language—the one undying hate and fury, and the other a proud and defiant contempt.

'L'isthani!' the Hebrew woman said again, as she fixed her dark evil eyes upon the other. 'L'isthani!' and still without glancing at her deliverers, the other met the look with one equally scornful. On the white cheeks there dawned a slight flush of red, and the thin weak hands clasped each other in a tighter grip.

An idea, at first put aside as incredible, but returning with greater force as the captive's vitality increased, had been simmering in Dalmayne's mind, and at last he bent his head close to her and said, 'Katie?'

At that she turned and seemed to listen, and again he cried, 'Katie! Katie Clayton!'

Her lips trembled pitifully, the hard look died out of her eyes, and her clasped hands relaxed. She placed one of them upon his shoulder, and looked at him earnestly, then moving stiffly and painfully, she regarded his companions. It seemed as though she could not credit her deliverance, and Dalmayne's heart ached at her misery.

He drew her closer in his arms as though she had been a little child, and kissed her. 'You are safe now, dear,' he said tenderly. 'Safe at last, little Katie!'

She flushed a little at the caress, and smiled warmly, then her head fell back, and her face went very white. Ascott sprang forward, and felt her pulse. In the middle of his ministrations there was a sound of

shouting from below, and presently up the stairway came Matatyowie and his men.

They pushed into the narrow chamber, almost filling it, and leaving the rescued girl in Ascott's charge, Dalmayne set to work to clear them out.

A glance sufficed to show Matatyowie and his men that there was no plunder to be obtained, except the one small bracelet which the Queen wore. On this the evil eyes of the chief fell, and springing upon her, he twisted it from her arm roughly, and was gone before the indignant murmurs of the men had died away.

The Queen sat very still, upon her knees rested her bruised and bleeding wrist, which she regarded with a bitter smile.

Dalmayne made a motion as of following the Swazies; but the doctor called him back.

‘We must get this girl to the wagon at once,’ he said decisively. ‘She must be attended to without delay.’

Leaving two troopers to guard the Queen, Dalmayne bore the light form downwards. At the foot of the stairs lay Fellowes' dead body; but of Cawley or his men, or the Swazies, there was no sign.

Under Dick's guidance, they made their way out through the big cave of the dead Hamie, across the narrow path through the spray and foam, and out at last into the blessed daylight.

The sun was nearly down, a cool breeze blew across the Falls. With eager feet they hurried up the slope

towards the wagons, Dalmayne watching with mingled feelings the pallid face so close to his own.

A cry and sound of running feet made him look up. It was Nurse Firmin, her eyes alight with anxiety and expectancy. She did not stop him, but walked by his side gently touching the long grey tresses which fell over his arm, and murmuring to herself, 'Poor soul! poor soul!'

There was nothing hard about Mrs. Firmin now. When they reached the tent-wagon, and had placed the girl upon her own bed, the erstwhile nurse warned them off, and with tender care clothed her charge in warm soft blankets, and tended her as a mother her child.

When the night closed in, when the wagon curtains were closely drawn, and the camp was silent, the elder woman knelt down in the wagon, and prayed long and earnestly. Sometimes in her earnestness she spoke aloud, and the sentry near at hand could hear her rendering thanks for the restoration of Katharine Clayton.

Tired and wearied out, Dalmayne had little time to rest himself. Sir George had to be carried the last few yards to the wagons, and Dr. Ascott had his hands full in attending to his many patients. Mallee Dick was still unconscious, two of the troopers and six Amaswazies dying from ghastly axe-wounds. Fellowes and three of his comrades were dead, and only thirty-six Swazies answered to the muster.

Her present chamber, from which there was no egress, was considered sufficient to guard the Queen, so, leaving a small squad of men to keep guard on the staircase by turns, and having seen to the camp guard for the night, Dalmayne at last took the rest he so much needed.

By daylight he was up again, and soon ascertained that Sir George and the rescued girl were progressing favourably, that the Hottentot Dick was almost all right again, and Mallee Dick still unconscious.

He started off with a party of troopers, leaving Cawley to lead the Amaswazies under Matatyowie, and Dr. Ascott in charge of the camp, first visiting the guard at the staircase, who reported that the Queen had not shown herself. Leaving rations for the party, the Australian and his men descended the steps, and under Dick's guidance searched high and low for Captain Clayton.

Doors in every direction flew open under the Hottentot's skilful manipulations, and Dalmayne, astonished at his success, asked him how it was he had not escaped from his gaolers.

'Kato,' said Dick lugubriously, 'shut Dick up in hole night time, watch him all day—too much assegaïs long of that.'

In a wide but low cave, quite close to the face of the falls, they came at last upon a man intently poring over some hieroglyphics. Occasionally he shook his head impatiently, and erased some of the figures, sub-

stituting others in their place, and thoughtfully observing them.

With a whine such as a dog might make, the Hottentot ran forward, and stood before the recluse.

'Baas!' he said timidly.

The old man took no heed.

'Baas—Baas Captain! Oh, reh!' the little yellow man cried, moving closer.

The other frowned, and looked round at him impatiently.

'Go away,' he said roughly; 'go away!'

The lad crouched down . . . 'Baas,' he said pathetically—'*I'm Dick!*'

The old man passed his hand over his high wrinkled forehead amongst the thin grey hair. . . . 'Well,' he said impatiently, 'what is it?'

The Hottentot looked at him in wonder—and turned to the eager face in the rear.

In response to his look Dalmayne came forward and held out his hand as the old man looked up.

'You are Captain Clayton?' he said cordially.

He looked at him suspiciously and motioned him away. 'Go away,' he said—'go away. I'm busy.'

'We have come to rescue you, sir. Your daughter is safe in the camp already—we had a long hunt for you.'

The old man crouched lower on his seat and put his hands suspiciously over the slate. 'Go away,' he murmured petulantly, 'I'm busy.'

Dalmayne looked at him in despair; his clothes were tattered and soiled, his face seamed with wrinkles, his long bony fingers opened and shut tremulously—and his eyes glanced furtively from his work to the intruders and back again.

Approaching nearer, the Australian placed his hand upon one shrunken shoulder. 'You will come with us and see your daughter, won't you?' he said as if speaking to a child.

The old man shrank nervously under his touch, and looked piteously at his slate. His lips opened and closed and he muttered words in a strange language.

'*Isban-Israel is dead!*' Dalmayne said suddenly, bending over and speaking loudly as to a deaf person. 'He is *dead!* you need not fear him.'

'*Dead! Isban-Israel?*' there was no joy in his tones, only an utter despair and misery.

'Yes, come and see—will you?' asked Dalmayne, eager to get him to move from his lonely chamber.

Drawing back from Dalmayne's proffered hand and leaning heavily on Dick's shoulder the old man followed them to the king's chamber.

The bright morning light made the cave bright and fresh—the currents of air from the crevices lifted the blue byssus gown that covered the tall still figure, and the old man thinking he lived bent reverently over him and uncovered his face.

Beautiful and kingly in life, Isban-Israel was superb in death; the onlookers stood by in reverent awe

while Captain Clayton looked down upon the dead face. He tottered a little as he turned away, and muttered to himself the while, the tears streamed down his face.

— 'Ah!' said Dalmayne—'it is a shock . . . but you are *free* now.'

The old man gazed at him with a bitter smile upon his lips, then cast himself upon the floor and moaned. . . . 'I was so near . . . so near! . . . and I had worked so hard!' he murmured between the sobs. 'And he is dead . . . the only one! . . . I shall never learn it now . . . never—never—never!'

His voice rose into a loud wail at the last words, and he wrung his hands in utter misery and despair. 'Never—never—never . . . the only one in all the world . . . the only one who knew! . . . Dead—dead—dead!'

CHAPTER XI

DR. JAMES ASCOTT, with a cigar in his mouth, strolled lazily up and down the esplanade under the library windows of Burton Abbey, one pleasant afternoon in June. A little older-looking than when we saw him last, a trifle graver, but bearing no visible signs of the hardships he had undergone at the Umganowie Mountains.

From the open window above him a girl's face looked down, and with a smile he waved his hand to her.

'I will be down in a minute, Jim.'

She joined him presently, and he held her at arms-length while he subjected her to a quizzical survey.

'Matrimony agrees with you, Dorothy, you are the very picture of a blushing bride.'

She made a little *moué* at him and lifted her face to kiss him.

'I've come for a good talk, Jim, neither George nor I are at all satisfied with you—you look so awfully grave and sad, dear.'

He laughed lightly. 'What do you want to know, you inquisitive little mortal?'

'I want to know all that happened after you left George at Cape Town, your letters were so unsatisfactory and short.'

'The whole story! Good gracious, Dorothy! it would take a week to tell you all that happened after we saw the noble baronet—whom you so familiarly dub "George,"—on board the *Durban* bound for England.'

'Don't be disagreeable, Jim, but tell me.'

Her brother made a comical gesture of despair. 'Well, Mrs. Inquisitive, after it had been finally settled that Miss Clayton should accompany Mrs. Firmin to Australia (and that was not settled without a great deal of consideration), we all started. . . .'

'Oh, I know about that part—tell me about the caves . . . why didn't you go on searching for that wicked Ira?'

'We had no wish to capture her, all we wanted to do we had done.'

'But she ought to have been punished—the *wretch*.'

'Dear,' he said sadly, 'she was a cruel woman, but she *was* punished, her husband . . .'

'Her brother too!'

'Only her half-brother . . . and you see it was their custom to intermarry like that: I do not think we should blame her, it had always been done in their tribe.'

'I don't care if it had—it was horrible! and I don't believe she cared for him.'

‘She cared for him more than most women care for their husbands; until he saw Isabel and sent his guards to capture her Ira reigned supreme. After that, even when Isabel was dead, she was always jealous and fearful; and when at last she saw him beginning to watch Katie Clayton her jealousy overmastered her, and if she had dared she would have killed her.’

‘Why didn’t she? she could have.’

‘She upbraided Isban-Israel with wishing to mate with a woman of another race, and at last, for peace sake, he allowed her to be removed beyond his ken on condition she was well treated. I think myself that the laws of his tribe forbade such a marriage, and that he was constantly studying the records to find some excuse for carrying out his wishes.’

‘But if Ira really loved him as a *wife* she should not have been jealous. I don’t believe she *did* love him.’

‘She risked her life—risked being captured by the fierce Amaswazies, to take a last look at him as he lay dead.’

‘I never heard that—who saw her?’

‘The Hottentot, Dick. He was going back to his old crib to find some miserable little charm, when suddenly he saw Ira moving along the corridor. He followed her, to track her and give her up to the Swazies—for he hated her: but when he saw her kneeling by the dead body of Isban-Israel with all her pride broken and her whole frame convulsed with sobs,

even Dick felt a thrill of pity for her, and stole away back to the camp without betraying her.'

'Well,' said the listener, 'I suppose she was sorry . . . but all the same, she ought to have been punished. What do you think became of her? Where is she now?'

'We do not know. Probably in the great caves of the Umganowie she rules over the remnant of her tribe, a lonely, broken-hearted woman.'

'You seem quite sorry for her, Jim; doesn't the thought of all her cruelty make you hate her? See how she spoiled Katie Clayton's life.'

'She made her very miserable, Dorothy, but she did not *spoil* her life. There are few women who have brighter futures before them than the sometime captive English girl.'

'But the memories!'

'Yes. She will never forget her captivity, but as the years go by, the pain of memory will grow less acute. She has other things to think of now.'

'Why did you go out to Australia again, Jim?' she said suddenly.

'I expect you guess, Dorothy; your husband has at least given you some hint.'

'He thought you cared for *her*,' she said timidly; 'but you were so full of fun, and always ridiculing things—things like that—and he was not sure.'

'He thought I cared, did he!' Ascott's voice had a tinge of sarcasm underlying a world of pain, and his sister stroked his arm tenderly in mute sympathy.

‘You did care, dear? Oh, I am so sorry, Jim . . . didn’t she—she——?’

‘No, Dorothy, she did not . . . she cared more for Dalmayne’s little finger than for all of the rest of us put together. She liked him from the very first.’

‘But why did you go to Australia again, then?’ she asked pertinaciously.

‘Why does any man hang around until he is quite sure there is no hope? I went because I had to . . . and she was not strong, poor girl. Afterwards, when they went up to the Station she improved, but at Cape Town she was still terribly upset, her father’s death was a dreadful blow to her.’

‘What did he die of? He was not so *very* old?’

‘As a doctor, I could give you a very long and unpronounceable list of various complications which brought about his death; but as a man, and to cut it short, he died of a broken heart.’

‘Poor old man! and his death threw his daughter’s recovery back?’

‘Yes. Almost the first thing the Hottentot Dick did, when his old master died, was to run into the hotel at Pretoria and blurt out the news to the sick girl.’

‘I wish I could have seen her, Jim.’

‘Would you like to see her photograph?’ He took a daintily bound case from his pocket and opened it.

‘They gave me this the day before they were married.’

‘Oh!’ she cried. ‘What a sad, sad face! Jim, is

she *really* as beautiful as that? and all that lovely white hair?'

'She is far more beautiful,' he said simply.

She looked at the other photo. 'I liked *him*,' she said presently, 'we had such a pleasant evening here just before they sailed. Fancy! I hardly knew George then, and auntie and I were quite afraid of him!'

'You are not much afraid of him now, kitten? At least, from what I have seen since I came back.'

'He is a dear!' she said. 'You cannot think how good and kind he is. At first I thought he was dreadfully stern, but do you know he is quite the opposite, and so thoughtful, Jim. When Jack telegraphed that you were coming, he went to meet you, and then after driving you home, went off to the tenants' meeting on purpose for us—you and I—to have a good talk.'

'He is very thoughtful; I know that, Dorothy. I did not live with him all those months without finding that out.'

'Come and sit down,' she said suddenly, 'it is too hot out here.' She drew him into the cool library and pushed him impetuously into an easy-chair. 'Jim,' she cried, slipping down upon the arm of the chair and caressing him . . . 'Do you think *she* will come back to England? Ever?'

'I do not think so. Why?'

'This place is hers, you know . . . and . . . I do so love it. I wonder if she will sell it to George?'

'Oh! that is what you are driving at?'

‘ Indeed, I was not, only everything looks so lovely to-day. It just came into my mind how I wished it was *really and truly* George’s, instead of his cousin’s.’

He stroked her head absently. ‘ You need not alarm yourself, dear. I know that she intends letting your husband have the place. She and Dalmayne talked it over before I left; everything here would remind her of her dead sister Isabel.’

‘ And she is *awfully* rich, you know, Jim, *awfully* ! I do wish she had married you, dear.’

‘ You mercenary little wretch !’

‘ But not for the money, Jim ; indeed, I didn’t mean that, but you are so grave over it all, and so, so cynical, I don’t like it in you. . . . It’s all very well for Jack, you know.’

‘ Poor Jack !’

‘ Did you often see her, Jim ?’

He writhed impatiently in his chair. This soft, fair-faced English girl, with her innocent blue eyes and baby ways, was as pertinacious as the veriest old scandal-monger in the village.

‘ Look here, Dot. I’ll tell you in my own way just how it was; but after this you must drop it, dear. Leave it alone for ever. My heart is too sore yet to bear questioning. Now listen.’

She plumped down upon a hassock, and rested her rosy face upon her little white hands, for all the world like a four-year-old baby. ‘ You’ll never be a grown-

up woman, Dot. You haven't got enough dignity in you. Suppose the servants were to see you.'

'Oh, *do* go on,' she said. 'I am listening, do go on!'

'Mrs. Firmin took her to her house at Burnside—near Adelaide. Dalmayne went up to Allaleena to meet his father, who was having trouble with his shearers. He left Mallee Dick at a private Hospital to be nursed up; and Dick the Hottentot stayed with me.

'There is not much to tell you of our lives out there. Mrs. Firmin was not her charge's social equal, of course, and did not go out into society—they had long drives about the hills, and Dick and I generally accompanied them on horseback. As she grew stronger, I think she found my society pleasant, and I began to dream dreams.

'After a while I saw her on one pretence or another every day—her youth revived in her, she began to feel a natural craving for the society of some one better educated than Mrs. Firmin. I got her books and flowers, took her to concerts, with her watchful old duenna, and for a while I—as I said—dreamt dreams.

'Then Dalmayne and his father came down from the North! I was there the evening Bert took his father out to see her.

'I suppose there is no grander-looking man in Australia than Bertram Dalmayne's father: a thorough gentleman, combining the courtesy of the town with the frank, hearty manners of the bush. Katie Clayton took to him at once. I saw Bert watching them as they met, and from the look in his eyes, I knew he loved her. I had hoped against hope during his

absence, but I saw the folly of putting myself against him now.

'He did not say much to her that first night, but wherever she went his eyes followed her: and when she began telling the elder man of Isban-Israel's desire to make her his second wife, and how he was frustrated by Ira's secreting her in a cavern only accessible from her own room—while she told them this—I could see Bert's great sunburnt hands opening and shutting with rage at the very thought.

'It was not many weeks after Dalmayne's return, that I went up one evening determined to say good-bye, and start next day for Melbourne. I could not stay in Adelaide and not go to her—and yet I knew it was useless going. I was like a moth at a candle, and was thoroughly wretched.

'They were out when I reached Burnside—had taken advantage of its being a glorious moonlight night to stroll up the Green Hill road.

'I drew an easy-chair into the honeysuckle-covered veranda and smoked. Mrs. Firmin's house is on the hill, and from where I sat, I could see the garden below, the park-like paddocks farther away, and beyond them the twinkling lights of the city and the silver shimmer of the sea.

'As I sat there thinking how beautiful it was, and half regretting my projected departure, the wanderers came in. Mrs. Firmin let herself into the house, and the other two strolled round on the path below me. I was in the shadow and they did not notice me.

'*She* was carrying her hat in her hand, swinging it lightly to and fro, the moonlight was shining down upon her great crown of silvery hair, and lighting up the folds of her white gown.

'It needed no words of theirs to tell me what had passed. I saw him bend his head and kiss a little feathery lock of hair which had escaped from its fastening, and essay to put it straight with his hands.

'I could not bear it, and moved softly away, intending to enter the house, but Dalmayne's quick ears detected the sound, and he called out.

'I stepped down to them, and almost at once he told me of his happiness. "We wanted you to be the first to hear it, old fellow," he said heartily, "we knew you would be glad!"

'Glad!

'We walked up the steps together. On the top step Dalmayne stopped and put one hand under her chin to tilt her face up while he kissed her. "My magic maid!" he said, "fancy her marrying a rough Australian bushman like me, Ascott!"

'I saw her eyes shining with happy tears, as she turned towards me. "Fancy Bert marrying an old white-headed woman like me!" she cried.

'*An old white-headed woman like her!*'

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